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Mrs. Gore

THE

DÉBUTANTE;

OR,

THE LONDON SEASON.

BY MRS. GORE,

AUTHOR OF "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS," "PEERS AND PARVENUS,"
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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LONDON :

R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

THE DÉBUTANTE.

CHAPTER I.

Oh ! les jolis tableaux !—Que ces gens sont heureux,
Comme leur vie est gaie, et comme ils n'ont d'affaire
Que les rians propos, la musique, les jeux,
Le loisir sans scrupule, et l'amour sans mystère.

EMILE AUGIER.

"My liege lady, generally," quod he,
"Women desyren to have soveraynte
As well over ther husbondes as ther love."

CHAUCER.

LORD BOWBRIDGE and Lord Mortayne were far from the only persons who decided Lady Alicia Barrington to be wonderfully improved by her sojourn in Paris. On many, the courtesies of manner, and graces of adornment she

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had acquired in a capital, where, of all others, people learn to make the best of their personal appearance, produced a strong impression; while, with others, the consequence derived from standing on a sufficient pedestal, conferred on her the charm of the cestus.

No one was surprised to see the Barringtons commence their London with an excellent house, establishment, and equipage. The newspaper announcement of Humphrey Barrington's inheritance sufficed to satisfy the world that the handsome young man of good prospects, who had flirted through the preceding season with Eleanor Maitland, was now in the enjoyment of his fortune. As a man with thousands per annum,—as the husband of a Right Honourable Lady Alicia,—as the Honourable Member for Rattleford,—he had only realized his former deceptive assumptions.

This was a happy thing for him; since no omen more inauspicious can attend a *début* of any kind in society, than a general feeling of surprise that demands explanation.

Even Lady Mortayne, the only person in

whom some astonishment was justifiable that, with prospects so brilliant, he had not endeavoured to efface from her mind the unfavourable impressions produced by her visit to Easton, having given implicit confidence to the paragraph recited to her by her husband relative to his accession of fortune, began to attribute to the desire of adding distinctions of rank to those of money, that sudden transfer of his attentions to the daughter of the Marquis of Heriford, which she had hitherto ascribed to pique at her coldness.

The vexation of finding the rival, whom, for a moment, she fancied crushed by her own union with the popular and distinguished Mortayne, prepared to dispute with her the palm of fashion, possessed of the same worldly advantages, and actuated by the same hollow-hearted pretensions, served, however, only as a spur to her flagging vanity, and increased the interest of her return to town.

“It will be hard, indeed, if, matching my face and age against Alicia’s, I do not obtain the best of it!” meditated Lady Mortayne, while

surveying herself in the swing-glass of her new mansion in Brook-street, arrayed for the drawing-room, at which her presentation as a bride has already been described; and though, in spite of the airy grace of the ringlets playing like light around her delicately turned throat and against cheeks rivalling the delicate texture of the rose-leaf, she was not wholly able to withdraw the public gaze from the dignified figure of Lady Alicia Barrington, attired with the perfection of taste that nothing but Paris can supply; the taste that forbids the introduction of a flower, bow, feather, or inch of lace too much, whereas the chief aim of English costume seems to consist in exaggeration,—there was certainly some pretext for the enthusiasm with which the fashionable journals dwelt upon the splendour of Lady Mortayne's diamonds, and the lustre of her eyes.

Lady Heriford, by whom the two brides were presented, and who, recently arrived in town, was overwhelmed with compliments on the happy establishment in life of both her daughter Alicia and her *débutante* of the

preceding year, (unable to resent against the latter her withdrawal of Morty from poor Lady Sophia, seeing how unceremoniously Charles Barrington had been appropriated by poor Lady Sophia's sister,) could not forbear glancing, amid the felicitations with which she was overwhelmed, at the happy bridegrooms of the two envied brides.

For there, all was not as it should have been ! Though by nature a nearer-sighted person than might be expected of her mother's daughter and daughter's mother, it was impossible for Lady Heriford to be otherwise than struck by the hollow eyes of Lord Mortayne, and by the lowering brow of her son-in-law. No brightness of exultation shone in either of their faces.

Of the latter, however, who was making his first appearance in that brilliant scene, in the highly-becoming uniform of Lord Heriford's yeomanry hussars in which, with that very view, he had obtained a commission, as much was said in extolment of his fine features and striking appearance, as though he were a *parti* to be disposed of. Nor was it possible for Eleanor to close

her ears against the commendations lavished upon him, which, among the fairer moiety of the spectators, exceeded even those of which she was the object.

“ I had no idea Mr. Barrington was half so good-looking !” observed Lady Essendon, who had troubled herself little about his looks, good or bad, till she found him a man of sufficient consequence to become the object of an opinion. “ I am sure no one thought much of him last season !”—

“ Fine feathers make fine birds,” retorted Lady Barbara Bernardo, the gaudy plumage of whose vulgar husband usually rivalled that of a macaw ; “ and he has got such a divine uniform !”

“ It is the same worn by Lord Henry de Capell, and I am sure it does not make an Apollo of *him* !” replied the Countess, who being a quiet domestic woman, and no scandal-monger, little knew how strongly her observation inclined Lady Barbara to extinguish her by slow poison. “ And just now, in the presence-chamber, I heard the new ambassador, Prussian,

Russian, Austrian—what is he?—(I never remember the names or distinctions of the *corps diplomatique*)—

“So I should have guessed!” murmured Lady Barbara, though in too low a voice to interrupt her.

—“but I mean the man in magnificent regimentals, all over turquoises and embroidery, and covered with orders,—inquire Mr. Barrington’s name, and say he was decidedly the finest figure he had seen in England.”

“A mere sympathy of gold lace!” cried Lady Barbara, pettishly, shrugging her shoulders. But the eyes of Lady Mortayne, beside whom she was standing in the vicinity of the Marchioness of Heriford, turned instinctively at the observation towards the towering form of Charles Barrington, made prominent by his showy hussar accoutrements; and, a few moments afterwards, *from* that brilliant figure to the person of Lord Mortayne, disfigured by the most frightful costume of civilized Europe—an English court-dress,—something between the uniform of the “Monkey who has seen the

world," and the gala dress of the *valetaille* of continental courts,—which even Morty's proverbial elegance of aspect could not redeem from the ridiculous.

He was not even looking at his ease. The drawing-room was a scene almost as strange to him as to his rival, and far more uncongenial. An appearance once a year at the levee, as a suitable homage to his sovereign, was all he had ever attempted in his "Morty" days;—in the discreet consciousness that a man having neither wife nor daughter to escort, is as much an encumbrance to others as his bag and sword to himself. There was consequently some pretext for feeling uncomfortable and out of place. However proud to present to the world, as his wife, the lovely being whose appearance in the throng was greeted by a murmur of applause, he could not help thinking that the only thing to be done at the drawing-room, after quitting the Royal presence, was to inquire for the carriage.

It might have afforded some consolation to the feelings of vexation produced in what Lady

Mortayne would have called her "heart," by the exterior inferiority of her lord, could she have surmised that the very beauty which so dazzled her in Barrington was a source of annoyance to his wife.—It was to *that*, rather than to the unaffectionateness of her nature and *hauteur* of her conduct, that Lady Alicia attributed his estrangement.—Above all, it was to *that* she ascribed his preference of the idlest scenes of youthful pastime,—ball, masquerade, or concert,—to the graver political circles, with a taste for which she was desirous of inspiring him. Instead of forwarding her hopes that he would adopt his parliamentary career with the zeal indispensable to distinction, the new member went through his duties with the careless levity of one whose world is elsewhere; one whom "a few hundreds" have rendered the representative of a family borough to which he is wholly unaccountable, and to the patron of which he is pledged only to give his vote for government, when government happens to be hard pressed.

Her own intentions, however, were by no means changed by discovering that the battle

must be fought single-handed. The greater the distance between her and her husband, the more completely was she at liberty to dispose of her time and engagements. Charles Barrington seemed bent on proving to her, that, *roturier* as he was, he could be as highbred in conjugal indifference as the best-born duke of her favourite Faubourg St. Germain.

Profiting by this letter of license, she accordingly hastened to attach herself by every filament within reach, to the dignitaries of the party supported by her family, in the way dignitaries of a party most value,—by their “ayes” and “noes.” While her cousin Eleanor was enjoying the much-coveted delight of inauguration in the sacred circle of *ultra* Fashion, more important in *her* eyes than Royalty itself, the loftier bride, to whom the smiles of duchesses and marchionesses were too familiar to be of the smallest account, derived scarcely less satisfaction from the introductions she requested from her mother to two or three bald-headed men, shuffling with crab-like grace out of the palace, and one or two particularly disagreeable-

looking women, whose words were as round as their persons angular; but whose names will make the fortune of a book of memoirs, fifty years hence.

A few of the heads of the *corps diplomatique*, on the other hand, voluntarily solicited to be made known to Lady Alicia Barrington; according to the orders to that effect transmitted to them, as *per* electric telegraph, from the headquarters of intrigue;—totally forgetting, even while gazing upon her unattractive face, that she was the same Lady Alicia de Capell to whom they had been accustomed to perform the morning and evening service of a bow, in each of the hundred and twenty-two days of the preceding London season.

Any one disposed to notice the acquaintanceships made, or renewed, on that memorable day by the two brides, might have understood how totally distinct their ideas and ambitions; Fashion being the idol of the one, as Influence of the other.

Meanwhile, however cold the deportment of the Honourable Member for Rattleford towards

his wife, and however abhorrent his feelings, he was far from insensible to the credit she imparted to his social position. While conversing with the first men of the day, with an intelligence brightened and polished by recent intimacy with those able talkers of France, by whom conversation is cultivated as one of the fine arts, or, rather, among whom fireside fluency is prized as scarcely less valuable than the eloquence of the *rostrum*,—Lady Alicia appeared to have stepped into the exact niche which nature qualified her to grace.—She was not only thoroughly in her place, but it was one that afforded more consistency to the position of her husband, as a newly-inheriting man, possessing neither landed property nor aristocratic connexion, than the utmost beauty and *gentillesse* of his fair partner of the preceding season.

Far other, alas! the feelings with which poor Morty contemplated the young wife by his side, whose tiara of diamonds bespoke the admiration of the vulgar; and whose lovely face, of all. He was scarcely less annoyed by the airs of indulgence with which she was received by the

great ladies of his *élite* set, as a novice requiring encouragement, than by the familiarity affected towards her by boys like Lord Newbury and Henry de Capell.

“How amazingly late you have come to town!” said the latter, interrupting, without ceremony, the embarrassed dialogue which accompanied her first introduction to the supercilious Countess of Bowbridge. “D’ye know there were bets out you would not come at all,—that you were going to ruralize through the season?—Wasn’t it good,—eh?”

“Have you been very gay, then,” replied Lady Mortayne, blushing from the fear of what might follow, “that you consider the beginning of May a late period of the season?”—

“Oh! amazingly!—Lots of balls!—If the influenza and Passion week had not come to set us right, one might have mistaken April for July!—We missed you shockingly at the *soirées* at Heriford House, didn’t we, Henry?—What fun we used to have, last season, eh, Lady Mortayne, leading the *cotillon* through the suite, down the back staircase, and up again

through the great hall! Do you remember that famous night when Henry made you carry the sofa-cushion to Esher, who turned sulky, and looked very much as if he were going to throw it at your head?"—

While Lady Bowbridge stood by, listening in dignified silence, as if waiting till Lady Mortayne was at liberty to withdraw her attention from topics so interesting and renew the conversation with herself, poor Morty felt that, had a cushion been within reach, he might have been tempted to follow Lord Esher's example. But before the prating grandson of his friend Huntingfield had half exhausted his silly reminiscences, Lord Henry de Capell commenced a series of whispers, a thousand times more offensive.

"When may I come and see you?" said he. "I hear you have a capital house,—which means, I hope, that you intend to do something to amuse us. We are sadly in want of something new; why not give Mazurka parties? Mazurka parties would be immensely popular; and, so fond as you are of dancing, amuse you

better than all the stupid dinner parties in the world."

"We will talk it over some morning, when you have seen my house," replied Lady Mortayne, solely with the view of getting rid of him.

"The Barringtons, who have been in town since March," resumed Lord Henry, nodding, rather than bowing, his acceptance of her proposition, "are by way of giving grand dinners, and that sort of thing. Alice was sure to have the dullest house in town; and she has made Charley as serious, and nearly as full of pretensions, as herself. But now *you* are come, you will, perhaps, bring him to his senses; which, I must do him the justice to say, have been absent without leave ever since he became a member of parliament."

Of this "bald disjointed chat," not a syllable was lost on Mortayne; who listened simply because he saw that Lady Bowbridge was silently forming an opinion of his pretty wife, from the nature of the incense laid upon her shrine. There might have been a time when

he talked in the same rattling, vapid style himself. But it was in his beardless boyhood,—twenty years before,—so long, that he had forgotten everything about the matter, except his sovereign contempt for the women to whom his nonsense was dedicated. Even now, he could scarcely think of them without shrugging his shoulders!—

And to hear a wife bearing his name, addressed with such prating familiarity, and in the hearing of Lady Bowbridge who had always thought so highly of his taste!—

If, after all, this lovely, graceful Eleanor, who, had he taken her at her word, would have been passing the spring with him among the lilacs and laburnums of their secluded shrubbery in the North, should turn out one of the group of dancing, flirting, young married women of the London season, whom he had always regarded as the most pitiful specimen of the sex!—If, after all, *his* name should be trailed in the dust of every ball-room,—polluted by the censure of every club!

As the idea glanced into his mind, his coun-

tenance assumed so despairing an expression, that he was not surprised, on rousing himself from his *rêverie*, to find the eyes of Lady Bowbridge fixed upon him with looks of ineffable compassion. For a vast looking-glass opposite to which they were standing, reflected the whole group; and the contrast between Lady Mortayne's spring-like form and apple-blossom complexion, and his own forlorn person, was only too grievously apparent.

Unwilling to dwell on objects so unsatisfactory, his eye took a wider range in the same tell-tale mirror; and, lo! the dignified figure of Lady Alicia de Capell, as she stood receiving the compliments of a prince of the blood, brought back so accusingly to his thoughts the image of the Sophia whom, at that moment, she strongly resembled, that it was no wonder he found it difficult to preserve his patience, when Lord Newbury recommenced his flippant flirtation with the Lady Mortayne so far less suitable to his age and habits of life.

"By Jove! what a surly brute it is!" observed Lord Newbury, turning to Lady

Mary de Capell, as soon as Morty having by persuasive looks, and a still more persuasive jerk of the arm, managed to impress on the lovely Eleanor that, her presentation being over, there was no occasion for her lingering at the palace so long as it might suit Lady Heriford and her unmarried daughters,—they disappeared from the gallery. “A pretty joke truly, if a superannuated Don Juan, like Mortayne, should take into his head to bring back from the East the lock-up-wife principle, and veil-and-lattice system!”—

“I hardly think it would answer with my friend Nelly,” rejoined Lady Mary, laughing; “but I must say, Lord Newbury, in justification of his Oriental fancies, that you attacked her somewhat like a Turk.”

“And I can tell you it will not answer to put Bluebeard out of sorts!” added Lord Henry. Having lost the Barringtons’ house as a lounge, we cannot afford to part with Mortayne’s.”

Then, taking him by the arm, he quietly impelled him down stairs.

“Bernardo’s carriage must be here by this time,” said he. “I desired him to send it back for me, and I can set you down at Mivart’s, on my way to Heriford House.”

CHAPTER II.

Have they not got polemics, and reform,
Peace, war, the taxes, and (what 's called) the nation,
The struggle to be pilots in the storm,
The landed and the monied speculation,
The joys of mutual hate to keep them warm,
Instead of Love,—that mere hallucination ?

BYRON.

HAD any one undertaken to insure to Charles Barrington or his wife, at the commencement of the preceding season, the position they now enjoyed, both would have regarded it as bliss beyond compare, as well as the unattainable vision of a fairy tale.

Could Charles have believed that he was to exchange the miserable discomfort of Easton, his precarious allowance and uncertain standing in society, for a noble fortune, a noble wife, a seat in parliament, and the command of

a well-appointed house in Arlington Street, he would have called himself a new Aladdin ;— or if, in Lady Alicia's case, to these advantages was added the alliance of one who passed for the handsomest young man about town, the superannuated young lady's notion of worldly bliss would have been quite as lavishly perfected as that of her husband.

Yet happiness was not in their household. The one thing needful was wanting. They were at peace neither with themselves nor with each other. Open warfare had not been renewed since they quitted Paris ; but only because there was too much of the epicurean in both, to hazard the *discomfort* of dissension.

To the world, therefore, nothing was apparent of their mutual contempt. The world saw only the easy grace with which Lady Alicia did the honours of her house, and the supreme excellence of her dinners. For with the true instinct of her calling, her Ladyship had soon discovered that the shortest way to people's intellects is the same as that usually described as the shortest way to their hearts ;—and that to make them

talk supremely well at her table, she must make her *menu* equally supreme.—A moderately good *chef* would not suffice to attract those whose vocation it is to barter their birthright of wit for a mess of pottage.

One of her first communications with her Parisian friends after her installation in town, therefore, regarded the transmission of a French cook, of sufficient merit to collect together under her roof the tribe of British and foreign *célébrités*, born to perfect the subordination of mankind, as that of Levi to minister to the mysteries of the synagogue;—a commission that sufficed to confirm her in their estimation, as worthy to preside over a branch-*bureau* of their calling—the white slave-trade of modern civilization.

It did not surprise them to perceive, in due distance of time after the start of Monsieur Pointd'ail and his accessories, that the paragraphs extracted from the London papers exhibited weekly, in a list of the company “entertained by Mr. and Lady Alicia Barrington, at their splendid mansion in Arling-

ton Street," the names of the leading ambassadors and ambassadresses,—cabinet ministers, privy councillors, law-lords, ex-governors-general, and retired lords-lieutenant after their kind;—besides presidents of academies, and now and then an artist or literary man of European renown, as a spice of flavour to the Cabinet pudding.—Such guests, and such a cook were as inseparable as cause and effect; or as the dual principle of the Hegelian philosophy.

A few of the Morty set,—a few of the White'sians, sufficiently versed in London life to know that a *clique* of this description is generally the foundation of years,—a cairn constructed by the voluntary contributions of personal respect rather than a Pimlico palace built by contract,—could not forbear inquiring, in one of their morning *juntas*, what took Lord Chancellors and Archbishops, French ambassadors, English dukes, and, above all, such squaretoes as Lord and Lady Coylsfield, to dine with such a person as "young Barrington." To which Old Vassall, a man as fully versed as Dodd's Peerage in the intricacies

of aristocratic relationships, replied that the Coylsfields were his cousins ; while, as regarded the still bigger wigs, a general chorus arose to explain, that they went to dine, not with “ young Barrington,” not even with his cook,—but with his wife ; the woman by whom the *casserole* trap was baited.

“ Lady Alicia, I can assure you, is a most superior woman !” observed some one who had tasted the *suprême de cailles* of Pointd’ail.

“ A woman of first-rate understanding !” added another, who was ambitious of the same honour, and, knowing that he was talking in a place where what is said is said to be repeated, trusted his defence would be properly reported. “ She was in Princess L——’s set, this winter in Paris, and passed among them for one of their best talkers.”

“ Indeed ?—Why, if praised by *them*, she must be something better than a good talker,—*i.e.* a goodlistener !”—cried Sir John Hildyard ; “ and, by Jove ! I’ll go and leave a card in Arlington Street this very afternoon.”

“ It is a great relief to find that Lady

Alicia, and not her husband, is ‘*l’Amphytrion où l’on dine!*’”—observed Lord Mortayne apart to the last speaker, as soon as the noisier group were out of hearing. “Before I came to town, the *réclames* of the Morning Post apprised me that a new Power had arisen among the great dining-houses of the great metropolis; and, not perceiving any justification for Barrington’s sudden accession of consequence saving the M.P. attached to his name, I was afraid this portended a new prodigy in the House of Commons.—One has had such an inundation of prodigies within the last few years!”—

“And the young Roscii are so apt to progress into lumbering hobble-de-hoys,” added Sir John, with one of his quiet smiles, “that, *blasé* with genius *à si bon compte*, one begins to languish after the common-place. Like the meteors on the stage, the smell of the resin puts one out of conceit with the blaze.”

“A good table is certainly a safer kind of sublimity than great oratory, as times go!” rejoined Mortayne. “Your man of genius, with a certain number of thousands a-year, is, more-

over, always mistrusted. The vulgar conceive that his talents are grown for him, like his prize pine-apples and early peas, by people salaried to understand the business better than himself."

"Of course, of course! — Hope never showed himself cleverer than by disowning 'Anastasius,' till it had gained its ground," retorted Hildyard. "Put forth as the work of Cræsus, it would have been read only by his friends; who, behind his back, would have gone about screwing up their mouths, and wishing he had consulted *them* before he ventured upon print."—

"But why *shouldn't* a man purchase a parliamentary, as well as a philanthropic, or any other reputation?" rejoined Mortayne, with a languid smile. "Advertise in the *Times* for a good speech of so many minutes on Free Trade, or the Oregon Question, and I have no doubt you would secure half-a-dozen *chef-d'œuvres*!"—

"Prize essays,—not speeches!" interrupted Hildyard.—"Pliny told us, some ages ago, that you may simulate philosophy, but not

eloquence: for which reason, there is more integrity in parliamentary renown than any other I wot of."

"It is a species of celebrity that has done much harm in its time,"—replied his friend. "There is far too much speechifying for the newspapers going on in the House.—All laurels contain poison, we are told; but it is strongest in those that spring in a soil which should produce only esculents for the good of the country. All honour to Pointd'ail, therefore, who has relieved us from a Chatham, forced into bloom by Lady Alicia Barrington's ambition of notoriety!"

"But is it a house worth dining at?" inquired Hildyard, who, having noticed the names of Lord and Lady Mortayne among the recent guests in Arlington Street, was desirous to ascertain a fact, important to a man whose days being bespoken in the highest places, cannot afford to waste one upon anything mediocre.—

"Lady Alicia is an old friend,—Lady Alicia is my wife's cousin!"—replied Morty; an answer instantly interpreted by Hildyard into "scandal in disguise."

“I understand—I understand!” cried he.
“Thanks!—On second thoughts, I will *not* leave a card.”—

“Then you will do yourself and the Barringtons wrong,”—rejoined Mortayne, more warmly.
“Believe me, I saw nothing to blame in either the hosts or their table.—If I found the thing a bore, the fault was in myself.—But one grows sick of seeing the same eternal efforts recommencing again and again;—people labouring to construct a *clique*, or a cabal, in eighteen hundred and forty anything, precisely with the same cunning one saw in use in eighteen hundred and twenty, and which our fathers beheld in operation twenty years before.”

“I am afraid, my dear Morty, you and I have our London a little too accurately by heart!” rejoined Sir John, with half a smile and half a sigh.—“I remember reading in Dr. Plot’s history of my native county, of an idiot who, having lived many years near a turret clock, and repeated the hours after it, continued after it had been removed to repeat the hours as correctly as before!—The force of habit renders one a sad automaton.”—

“And as Pope observes in his Letters,” added his companion, with the sigh without the smile, “out of habit and out of HELL, there is no redemption!”—

“You should not say so, Morty,” rejoined Sir John Hildyard, “after taking us by surprise, as you did, by your marriage!—I never expected to miss you from my side in the ranks of the—

Bachelors of England, who live at home at ease; much less, that, having deserted us, you should still complain of the monotony of London life.—You have now seen the shield on its golden side.”—

“Which does not prevent its being the self-same shield which I approached on the silver one!”—rejoined Mortayne, more cheerfully. “From the moment one joins the *corps d’armée* of society, whether we fight in the light infantry or heavy brigade, the field to be conquered, and the means of conquering it, are the same. What can Lady Alicia Barrington achieve by her endless toil of hospitality, but to do the thing worse in Arlington Street, than she has

been seeing it done all her life at Heriford House?"

"Make herself popular.—She probably wants to blind her handsome husband to her want of attraction."

Poor Morty almost winced. Even by an old friend, he could not bear to apprehend that his own *raw* was discovered.

"I suspect the handsome husband exercises but small share among her motives!" said he,—"My dear Alfred, how are you?—From Lumley's, of course, by your privy-council airs!—When are we to have the new ballet?"

But though it was easy to change the subject of conversation, he was tolerably well aware that people expressed quite as much wonder at his doing so *little* in his new establishment towards forwarding the pleasures of the season, as *he* at the gratuitous exertions of Lady Alicia. Morty's old friends had fully intended him to entertain them as freely as they had long been in the habit of entertaining himself. From *him* they wanted no *suprême de Cailles*. He might have had a *Pointd'ail* or a Jane Thompson

to preside over his stoves, and their feeling on the subject would have been the same. They wanted to taste his bread and salt.—Bowbridge and Hildyard wished to see him happy,—happy with his pretty wife,—happy under the shadow of his own vine: Lord Alfred and Alan Harkesley, to discover whether a wife and a vine of his own, had converted even Morty into a snob!—

But their interest or curiosity remained ungratified.—Morty who professed “not to give dinners,” gave nothing. On that point, Lord and Lady Mortayne were unanimous. The fair Eleanor had no mind to be matched against her more experienced kinswoman; nor, even if certain of eclipsing her, had she the smallest taste for the *éclat* to be obtained by the small-talk emitted between ambassadresses and cabinet-ministers, while eating *pâtés* at her dinner-table. For *her* there was as little charm in the hollow-hearted, hollow-chested, hollow-eyed sons of cipher, with their Orders and disorders,—cordons on their shoulders and bowstrings in their pockets,—as to Lady Alicia, in the slender

guardsmen, the Lord Newburys and Henry de Capells, by whom, to the utter annoyance of her husband, Lady Mortayne was surrounded the moment her brilliant figure was seen in a ball-room.

Whenever from some opposite box at the opera he glanced into his own, to ascertain whether the moment were propitious for attempting the *séance* which even the most ultra-fashionable of husbands is allowed for half an hour or so, in the course of the evening, he saw it filled with a group of boyish faces, like cherubs clustered over a tombstone.—Such companionship he could not but hold unsuitable to Cæsar's wife; and it was a relief to him whenever Barrington, whose manner was at least cold and correct and whose position in the world positive, made his appearance in the box, to take his almost silent place by the side of Lady Mortayne.—Not because from that moment the lovely face of Eleanor assumed its most sunshiny appearance; but that no further inroad need be apprehended upon those formalities of custom which, in certain circles, are more formidable than law or pandect.

It was the delicate appreciation of these,—a tact that was incapable of sinning against the fitness of things, or hazarding a word or look save in the proper place,—which constituted the good breeding for which Morty had always been so famous. This fastidiousness *was*, in fact, Morty; and though, at a distance from London life,—in the wilds, no matter whether of Westmoreland or Arabia,—better qualities had assumed the ascendancy, no sooner was he once more involved in the ever-moving atmosphere of London, and the restless, noisy, vulgar round of its tumultuous pleasures, than he experienced his former desire to mark his distinction from the herd, by calmer modes of life and a more reserved deportment.

When, on passing his drawing-room door one morning, on his way to his dressing-room, and, hearing shouts of laughter proceed from it, in which the voice of Eleanor was intermingled with strange voices of the most vulgar intonation, and a key that would have done honour to a party of country cousins vociferating their wonder at the feats of Monsieur Philippe or

Herr Dobler, it was no consolation to be told that his lady's visitors were Buckinghamshire neighbours of Lady Heriford,—“Mrs. and Miss, and Miss Georgiana Vicary Arable.” From Lady Alicia, such people would never have obtained toleration.—

After a few hints on arriving in town concerning the selection of her acquaintance, he had, however, refrained from interference. He made allowance for the tastes of her age. He did not want her to think him a bore.—After all, Lord Newbury, Lord Henry, and the rest of the cherubim, were of her own years, and in point of connexion, irreproachable. It was his own fault if he had selected a partner from a generation which was the posterity of his contemporaries.—It was his own fault for having lived before his time, and for pretending to live after it.—

At all events, he was careful not to expose the discrepancies of his *ménage* to the microscopic eyes of his intimates.—Lord Alfred and Harkesley should not carry good stories to the Clubs of the *naïvetés* of the country-miss

who presided over the cold cutlets and scorched turkey-poults of "poor Morty." Nor did he choose to see some raw boy like Newbury, occupying by her side at table the place of his urbane and intelligent friend Hildyard.

To Eleanor, this was a relief.—She had rather apprehended a system of eternal dinner-giving to the class of middle-aged gentlemen whose conversation is chiefly prefaced by "I remember," or "I recollect."—At Mortayne Manor, she had supped full of reminiscences; and was far better pleased to shine in ball-rooms, or *trôner* in her opera box, than preside over the stateliest entertainment ever planned and performed, (for if funerals be "performed" why not state dinners?) by the ambitious lady of Arlington Street. Not having yet attained the age of discovering to how much greater advantage a woman is seen in her own house than in that of any other person, she was glad to dispense with the *corvée* of entertaining people as tedious to *her*, as Old Vassall to her lord.—

The danger of all this was, that the sameness

of the home *tête-à-tête* might impart too great a charm to the company of such as, like Charles Barrington, were at the pains to make themselves agreeable elsewhere. So long a time had not elapsed since the preceding season, but he had still perfect, by heart, the whims and predilections of the lovely *débutante* of Heriford House. *He* knew, though Morty did *not*, what operas she preferred,—whose pictures attracted her to linger near them at the Exhibition,—the favourite passages of her favourite writers,—the pet shops she frequented,—the promenades she liked best,—and, above all, the negative or positive attraction of the various members of her set.—No fear of *his* placing her at table near a bore.—No fear of *his* omitting to inform her that one of her *affidées* was come to town.—If Meshech Bernardo inquired, on entering the French play, whether Lady Mortayne were there, not the slightest chance of learning from *him* the number of her box!—

With every body, indeed, Barrington was becoming a popular man. All that had been

unrecommmendatory in his manners the preceding season, (the result of a false position and uncertain prospects,) was giving place to a deportment as pleasing as his person had always been handsome. Barrington was invariably cited among the three best-looking men in London; and, as many years the junior of the Horatian and Cecilian triumvirate with whom the voice of society did him the honour to conjoin him, he had decidedly the best of it. When the lovely Lady Mortayne was seen leaning upon his arm on her *sortie* from some place of public amusement, or riding by his side, in the park, on her beautiful barb, the unsophisticated crowd, mistaking them for man and wife, was sure to proclaim them a charming couple.

“God bless ye, my Lord and my Lady!” was the cry of one of the Irish linkmen at the door of Lady Bowbridge’s ball;—“sure it’s an iligant sight to see such as yees together!”—

It was, at all events, a pleasure they often afforded. No two people of the set they lived in, fell so readily to each other’s share.—Habit

had probably some influence in their approximation. They came instinctively together, at the close of a *fête*, as was their wont the preceding year; and it was as much pleasanter for Barrington to meet, on such occasions, the sunny face that always smiled upon him, than the one whose dark eyebrows and marked features were habitually contracted by dread lest he should have been infringing *les convenances*, or talking nonsense to a magnifico, (much in the habit of talking leading-articles,) to whom she had been forced to present him,—as to Eleanor to be accosted by one who exclaimed, “I will not ask whether you are tired,—your looks answer for you!—*You* feel, as I do, that it would be well to have so delightful a ball begin over again!”—instead of “The carriage has been here these three hours!—Are you aware that it is four o’clock?”—

On this latter point, indeed, it was so difficult to impress Lady Mortayne, and Morty was one to whom it was so impossible to make a bugbear of his coachman, or set up his carriage-horses as personages to be respected, (after the

custom of most ball-going husbands of a certain age,) that he accepted the less offensive alternative of stealing off as soon as night became at odds with morn, and leaving her to settle the question.—

While surveying London, as a remote evil, from his Westmoreland fireside, a dancing Lady Mortayne had appeared an impossible thing! His sylph-like bride was of a dancing age, indeed,—but she had embraced another destiny. She, who had chosen to be the wife of a Morty, must have known that Morty's wife was not to be confounded with the throng, or to act upon general principles.—Morty's wife was specific.—Morty's wife, like Falkland's, must not condescend to "run the gauntlet through a string of puppies."

There was no need to make an enactment on the subject.—He was not going to present himself to the eyes of the lovely spirit that had alighted beside his household hearth, in the guise of a tutor.—She had, of course, tact enough to discern such things, unprompted. At all events, there was no immediate occasion

to convert himself into a Mentor ; for at that epoch, he little contemplated a season in town.

But by the time a paroxysm of *ennui* determined them, as soon as the leaves were again on the trees, to hasten back to London,—*dear* London,—the London so reviled and so beloved,—it was too late!—Lady Mortayne had taken the initiative by speaking of dancing, as of breathing or eating her breakfast,—as a matter of course. After which, how was Morty to find courage to say, “Surely you do not mean to dance?—The wife of a man of *my* age is out of place among dancers!”—

No! decidedly he could not fling the first stone at himself by the words “a man of *my* age.”

Arrived in London, however, Eleanor showed no inclination to dance. The marked position assumed in society by Lady Alicia Barrington inspired her with a higher order of ambition:—not, indeed, that of contending with the influential lady either as a dinner-giver or an *intrigante* ; but to hold her own in Morty’s set,—to obtain her allotment as Lady Mortayne, on

the same line with the Duchess of Nantwich, Lady Bowbridge, Lady Harkesley, and the rest of the clique;—a pretension which necessarily kept her aloof from the callow twitterers of the ball-room.

But having made the attempt, her pride revolted against the mere toleration extended to her.—To those with whom she was desirous of identifying herself, Morty had so completely belonged, that they could not refrain from an air of patronage towards his pretty little wife, as if *she*, too, were their property;—regarding her with the same indulgent notice *she* bestowed on her Italian greyhound.

As much *de trop* among persons whose antecedents were totally unknown to *her*, (though as well known to each other as if they formed part of the same family,) as Barrington among the protocolists with blue ribands with whom his wife would fain have compelled him to consort, no wonder that, before the close of the month of June, she should be cited by the newspapers as among the *belles valseuses* at the ball of the French ambassadress.

An invitation to dance from a royal partner had, in the first instance, made refusal impossible. But, either because aware of the admiration she excited by resuming her place in the ball-room, or because Lord Mortayne was too proud to express his annoyance at seeing her confounded in the giddy crowd of the boys and girls of the day, she took his silence for approbation. From that night, not a *fête* at which Lady Mortayne, and her favourite partner of the preceding year, were not seen engaged together in what the *Morning Post*, with elegant originality, designates “the mazy round!”—

CHAPTER III.

A sort of intellectual mule,
Man's stubborn mind in woman's shape;—
Too hard to love,—too soft to rule,—
An owl engrafted on an ape.
To what she calls the realm of mind
She leaves that throne, her sex, to crawl;
The *cestus* and the charm resign'd,—
A public gaping-show to all.

BULWER'S TRANSLATION OF SCHILLER.

THE progress of the season achieved for Lady Alicia Barrington, what the cross ugly girl, reclining in a corner of Lady Heriford's family coach the year before, had certainly never ventured to contemplate,—a definite position in the highest circle of London society.

Every one was ambitious of being on the visiting list of a person disposed to take so active a part in the pleasures of life; and when, in the

month of July, a period of the season when fine people have progressed into still finer, and the edge of the exterminating sword of exclusion is at its keenest, her Ladyship's admirable dinner-parties were crowned with a select concert, consisting, by way of attraction, of the *élite* of the Italian opera, and by way of audience, of the handful of foreign royalties which, thanks to steam, arrive in England every spring by a migration as regular as that of the swallows,—all the foreign ministers and their females, and a couple of hundred persons of the highest rank or personal consideration,—Mrs. Vicary Arable and Lady Ironsides, who had been careful to send cards to the bride on her return from Paris, were forced mutually to admit that there was no use in troubling their heads further about Lady Alicia Barrington,—that “it was plain she fancied herself a very great lady and did not mean to be civil.”

The damsels in pink satin and lilac gauze, who had laboured so hard at Greensells to recommend themselves to the graciousness of the Ladies de Capell, suggested, indeed, to mamma

that it was all her own fault ;—that they had heard her describe the Barrington family to Lady Alicia's brother, Lord Clandon, as "people of whom she knew nothing."—But Lady Ironsides assured them in return that *this* could have had no share in excluding them from Lady Alicia's charming concert, inasmuch as she had reason to know that Lord Clandon never entered his sister's house: As their county member, *he* was not able, even if inclined, to shake off in London the lady of the Buckinghamshire baronet, with the great park and great estate, whom it behoved him to entertain in the country;—and he was consequently forced to undergo, with apparent cheerfulness, their fussy state dinners in Cavendish Square. "Even Lord Clandon," added Lady Ironsides, "is not half fashionable enough for Lady Alicia."

The woman who was fine enough to cut her relations, and too fine to be seen in the usual places of public resort, passed, of course, with the vulgar for something exquisitely refined; and by the earnestness with which her acquaintance was sought by those usually courted for

their notice, she had reason to congratulate herself on having accomplished her aim.

It was with the utmost reliance on herself and her consequence, therefore, that when, about the middle of July, the Dowager Lady Kilsythe passed through town on her annual expedition to the Isle of Wight, Lady Alicia displayed the house and establishment of which she was so proud, to grandmamma and her sister Sophia, who, in the tranquil contentment of Warleigh, appeared to have regained all her happier impulses of youth and health.

“ You have indeed a charming house, Alice !” said her sister, with warm approval, as they stood gazing from the drawing-room window across the animated scene of the Green Park, towards the far less favourably situated palace of their sovereign.

“ Somewhat more cheerful, is it *not*, than the horrible old courtyard of Heriford House, which looks like the *préau* of a prison !”—

“ Did you fit it up, yourself, my dear ?” inquired grandmamma, glancing contemptuously at the curtains of woollen damask.

“Myself, grandmamma?—Surely you give me credit for better taste!—No! We took it as we found it. It was not worth while to make much alteration as we have it only for three years.”—

“*Three years?*”

“Impossible to obtain a longer term. Lord Clanmorley, to whom it belongs, will be of age by that time, and intends to reside in it himself.”

“After all, then, it is a ready-furnished house, hired of a house-agent!—whereas, my dear Alice, what you graciously call a prison, is a family mansion,—a freehold,—the house built by your grandfather, and intended to last the time of his great-grand-children’s great-grand-children. That is what *I* call a charming house;—where the expenses and improvements you indulge in are not made for the benefit of strangers!”

“You forget, grandmamma, that *I* am not married to a Marquis of Heriford!” argued Lady Alicia.

“You are married to a man who has attained, within a thousand a year, all the fortune he pretends to,” rejoined Lady Kilsythe;—“and

it would be consequently better policy to purchase outright a residence proportioned to it, and establish yourself for the remainder of your days."

"I am not certain that such a purchase might be convenient to Mr. Barrington," answered Lady Alicia, a little out of the habit of being taken to task.

"Not *convenient*? When he has just come into a princely fortune,—a fortune enabling him to decline further assistance from my hands,—(a spirited and honourable feeling, by-the-bye, for which I give him ample credit.) With the prospect of a family before you, you should persuade him, my dear, to provide you with a permanent abode."

"*Entre nous*,—I have some reason to think," rejoined Lady Alicia, in a lower key, "that Mr. Barrington's fortune consists principally in an annuity,—a life income —"

"You have '*some reason to think*!'" retorted the dowager, hastily taking off the spectacles through which she had been contemplating the rising shrubberies of the Green Park, and seating

herself magisterially in an arm-chair which had been placed for her near the window by Lady Sophia. "Are things come to such a pass between you after six months' marriage, my dear, that you are admitted only so far into your husband's confidence as to have '*some reason to think*' about the terms of his uncle's will?"

"Most men are reserved about money matters, even with their own family," replied Lady Alicia, with increasing indignation at being thus catechized.—"It is not every woman who obtains in her *ménage* the overweening influence enjoyed by my mother. And if to be purchased only by marriage with a man thirty years older than oneself, and at the cost of a life of attorney-work such as I have seen undergone by mamma, I am quite content to leave to Mr. Barington the undisturbed enjoyment of his parchments and banker's book!"—

"It strikes me, however, my dear Alice, that if the newspapers tell truth," observed grandmamma, "your comings and goings for the last three months (in order to accomplish the great labour of nothing), have taxed your

time nearly as much as if you had been at the pains of taking a share in your family concerns. A journey to Doctors Commons, and a shilling, would have put you in possession of the contents of the will, if your influence over your husband be insufficient to obtain them in a more suitable manner."

"But, surely, dearest grandmamma," interposed Lady Sophia, her cheeks suffused with a rising colour, "you would not have my sister obtain by underhand means the information her husband thinks proper to withhold?"—

"I would not recommend such measures to *you*, my dear; and to you, Sophy, they would never have been necessary. But Alicia affects the strong woman—the woman to whom all arms are available in self-defence;—and among these, I do not consider the facilities afforded by one of our national institutions the most objectionable."

"I am content to take my fortunes as they reach me, without troubling myself about their origin,—just as I do not think it necessary to pull up yonder beautiful rose-tree to examine

the form of its roots," said Lady Alicia, with a smile. "We have five thousand a year; we are to inherit another thousand at the death of Mr. Barrington's parents; and, having no country place to keep up, such an income enables us to live handsomely in town."

"To entertain your friends brilliantly during the season, and live upon them the rest of the year!—Is not that it?" was the cool commentary of the dowager. "The system is not a new one among people having no seat of their own."

"To visit my husband's family, or mine, at their country residence, my dear madam," replied her granddaughter, with some *hauteur*, "can scarcely be termed living on one's friends!"

"Have you ever thought of inviting your father and mother-in-law to come and stay with you here?" demanded the matter-of-fact dowager.

"Mr. Barrington is a man who detests London," replied her granddaughter. "But with respect to visiting him, he gave me a

general invitation to Easton, at the time of my marriage.”—

“ By which you have shown wonderful alacrity to profit ! ” —

“ Dear grandmamma ! — Alice will fancy you are displeased with her ! ” interposed Lady Sophia, perceiving from certain inflations of the nostril, familiar of old to Lady Alicia’s sisters, that the chafings of her temper were becoming greater than were likely to be controlled by the authority of a grandmother of whom she was now independent.

“ No—not displeased, my dear.—She has acted precisely as I expected.—I have no right to be displeased.”

“ I can scarcely imagine any just cause for displeasure,” said Lady Alicia with some dignity, “ in my having surrounded myself with the best society in London, and given offence to no one.”

“ The best company, my dear, is the most *suitable* ! ” replied the dowager, undismayed by the grandeur of her airs. “ I quite agree with the public (whose opinion, strange to say, reaches

even as far as Warlegh!) that you were not called upon, as the wife of a squire, with (according to your own account) a life income of five thousand a year, to entertain the same personages whom your father, as the second Marquis in the kingdom, was bound to receive at his table."

"I rather think," observed Lady Alicia, in a tone of exultation, which not even the strictures of the dowager had power to repress; "I rather think that a considerable number of *my* guests are known only by name at Heriford House."

"I believe you, my dear, I believe you,—and so much the worse!—What in the world is there, Alicia, in your condition or talents, to place you on a level with the Cabinet Ministers and Ambassadors you have been gathering together, by hook or by crook, at your table? You are a young woman of moderate understanding, or you would not have acted with so much precipitation, as to allow your ambition of forming a *salon politique* to be found out, so as to authorize those who know that Rome was not built in a day, to laugh at you in

their sleeve, as they did at Aguado the speculator, for fancying he could improvisate a gallery of the old masters!"—

"The sneers of all London would do nothing to disprove the fact that my house is frequented by the leading men of the day," persisted Lady Alicia, not a little nettled.—

"Not frequented,—do not mistake yourself, my dear!" persevered grandmamma, with her usual provoking firmness. "When you ask them to dinner,—they dine with you—to meet each other at a table where they are sure of good cheer. They do not, and never *will*, come to you gratuitously, and again and again,—as they used to Princess L—— and Lady H., whose houses *were* 'frequented,'—because they were those of an Ambassador and Cabinet Minister, or leader of the Opposition. In *their* hands was power. *Their* talking tended to action. But the utmost your endeavours will accomplish is a sterile copy, the Dalmatic robe of empire, stuffed with straw! Sorry work, my dear Alicia, for a grown-up baby of your age, to be playing at make-believe diplomacy!"

To divert the attention of her angry sister,

Lady Sophia began to question her about their family interests.—

“Blanche and Mary are looking well, and seem in excellent spirits,” said she.—

“Ay, ay! Because by the removal of two elder sisters,” interrupted grandmamma, drily, “they have *tontined* to the head of the house. But for your marriage, Alice, and Sophy’s consenting to keep the old woman company, they might have waited for the next ten years for any thing better than a back seat in their mother’s carriage or opera box!”—

“I hear nothing of Sir Wolseley Maitland, this year?” said Sophia, interrogatively, and, as if in relation to her sister Mary.—

“He is in Ireland.”

“On a visit to his estates, instead of wasting the season in London? Then there may be good in him after all.”

“I am sorry to clip the wings of your Quixotism,” said Lady Alicia, still half sullen from the lesson she had received. “Sir Wolseley is simply gone salmon-fishing.”

“I cannot say he was ever a great favourite

of mine," added her sister; "but Mary seemed to like him, and mamma thought it an advantageous match."

"At present, Mary scarcely knows what she likes," replied Lady Alicia, "except flirting and folly. I am sorry to say the intimacy with Harry Rubric is greater than ever."

"Rubric?—A son of Lord Greatithe's?" inquired grandmamma; "the man with that fine preferment at his disposal?"

"Yes, but unluckily his family is as large as his patronage," replied Lady Alicia. Poor Mary fancies that, because Lord Greatithe can give livings, instead of estates, to his sons, they are sure of rising to be dignitaries in the church, and dreams of nothing but lawn-sleeves. Yesterday, she asked me, seriously, how many of the bishops had palaces in London, and whether it would be thought odd for a bishop's wife to dance!"

"Mary was always a giddy, prating girl!" said Lady Kilsythe, with an air of disgust, apparently conceiving it impossible such a question could have been asked in earnest. "I am

glad she did not marry young Maitland!—*His* was not the character to improve her. Bad blood those Maitlands;—the men, boors,—and of the women, the less said the better!”—

“I assure you, dear grandmamma, the world finds much that is agreeable to say of Lady Mortayne,” observed Lady Alicia,—glad of an excuse to disagree with the dowager, though on a point where their opinions coincided.

“I am glad to hear it, my dear. It will require a great deal of merit on her own and her brother’s part, to efface the memory of their mother,—one of the worst women that ever breathed!”

Lady Sophia, who had seldom heard grandmamma thus acrimonious, could not forbear whispering—“We must not, however, forget that she is a relation.”

“That we have never forgotten it, Sophy, is sufficiently proved by the kindness of your mother, in introducing her daughter to the world,” replied Lady Kilsythe, sternly. “For *was* a sacrifice, I can assure you.”

“Poor Eleanor’s situation was so friendless!”

pleaded Lady Sophia—"left solely to the mercy of that selfish, thoughtless brother!"

"Ay, poor thing,—deplorable enough!" rejoined the dowager;—"her father dead, and her mother worse than dead!"—

"Is Lady Maitland, then, still alive?" demanded Lady Sophia, with some interest.

"Do not call her Lady Maitland, my dear.—She was divorced twenty years ago!"

"Yes,—I am aware of that.—But not knowing what name she has since assumed—"

"She was divorced, I think, for running away with Colonel Grimston, of the Guards?" said Lady Alicia, who piqued herself on knowing everything about everybody;—"that grey-headed General Grimston whom one sees at the Ancient Concert."

"Sir *Robert* Grimston.—But he, you know, my dear Alice, is married to one of the sisters of Sir Alan Harkesley," observed Sophia.

"Colonel Grimston's connexion with our wretched relative was a very momentary affair," said Lady Kilsythe;—"only sufficient to deprive *him* of public respect and ten thousand pounds,

and to secure *her* being divorced by Sir John. But it is both imprudent and repugnant to inquire into the history of such people!—The lesson afforded is often dearly bought; for I scarcely ever knew a woman who renounced her place in society, that did not prove herself incapable of understanding its value, by falling fifty fathoms lower than her original fall:—as in some noble structure, when a single column gives way, the whole edifice is in danger.”

“Lady Maitland, then, has disgraced herself since her divorce?” demanded Lady Alicia, to whom the modern instances of grandmamma were less insupportable than her wise saws.

“I requested you before, my dear Alicia, not to describe her by the name of Lady Maitland! She has been known for some years by the name of Comtesse de Saint Chamond.

“*Comtesse de Saint Chamond?*” reiterated Lady Alicia, with an air of the most profound amazement.—

“Perhaps you came across her during your visit to Paris?”—rejoined old Lady Kilsythe.—
“But no, it is scarcely possible!—For when,

ten years ago, at the request of one of her sisters who was then living, your mother commissioned the Comte de Choiseul (who, when attached to the French Embassy, used frequently to be staying at Greensells,) to make inquiries, he was forced to apprise us that, after taking up her residence abroad, she had fallen into the worst hands and the lowest depths of infamy. After all we heard, it would have been a relief had further tidings satisfied us that she was no more."

"The Comtesse de St. Chamond!" was all that Lady Alicia still articulated. But it was evidently a mechanical ejaculation, connected with some inward struggle of emotion.

"And is it likely that poor Lady Mortayne should be aware of these grievous particulars?" inquired Lady Sophia, with an air of genuine sympathy.

"I rather think not.—My daughter exacted of the Count to keep secret the result of his inquiries; and it is generally believed among her former friends that this unfortunate woman is no more. Sir John Maitland, who, to his

dying day, retained the bitterest spirit of animosity against one who had dishonoured himself and his children, and never spared them the shame of hearing her name coupled with the most fearful epithets, dwelt only on her delinquencies with reference to Colonel Grimston; and, if aware of all she had become, would not, I suspect, have confined his invectives within such narrow bounds.”—

“And you are quite certain, dear grand-mamma,” persisted Lady Alicia, “that the mother of Eleanor and Sir Wolseley now goes by the name of Comtesse de St. Chamond?”

“Quite certain. But in what way does it interest *you*, my dear, since it appears certain that Sir Wolseley has no thoughts of proposing to your sister Mary?”—

“I was only trying to find excuses in such parentage for the levity of Lady Mortayne’s character,” replied Lady Alicia, endeavouring to look unconcerned.

“But surely Eleanor is steadied, now?” inquired Sophia, becoming more interested in the subject of conversation.

“What do you mean by steadied *now*?” reiterated her sister.—“It is only recently that opportunities for levity have been afforded her.—Any silly flirtation in which she indulged last season, arose from girlishness,—from lightness of heart. But to flirt as the wife of Lord Mortayne,—of a man so much older than herself—lays her open, of course, to the suspicions and animadversions of the world.”

“And *does* she flirt, as the wife of Mortayne?” again inquired Sophia, with a face of the utmost concern.

“Nay, my dear Sophy, if you can find nothing better to discuss with your sister than the scandals of the season,” grandmamma was beginning in her turn—

“Do not not be afraid!”—interrupted Lady Alicia, surmising the cause of her uneasiness. “In *this* house, the name of Lady Mortayne is sacred. The utmost I have to say about her is to thank Heaven that Clandon resisted our foolish importunities that he would make her his wife. For worlds, would I not have had her for a sister-in-law!”—

“ I am beginning to think you are never likely to have a sister-in-law !”—cried grand-mamma, fractiously, rising from her arm-chair with the deliberateness of her age, and accepting the offered arm of Lady Sophia, to make the best of her way to her carriage. “ Your mother tells me that her son Henry never leaves the side of that seed of thistledown, (and therefore, perhaps, the fitter food for him !)—Lady Barbara Bernardo ; while as to Clandon, I find he has never shown his face in society this season !”

“ I can, at least, certify that he never comes *here* !” replied Lady Alicia :—“ but *that* I attribute to the shyness he perhaps feels towards my husband. He may fancy that Mr. Barrington is inclined to take in ill part his conduct towards his cousin.”

“ Whose conduct ?—Clandon’s ?”—

“ No one can deny that, for so shy and reserved a man, my brother flirted outrageously with Miss Brenton ! And though, at the time, he meant, of course, nothing but to render his stay at a place so dull as Greensells less insupport-

able, as things have turned out, she would not have been so bad a match for him after all."

The tapping of the dowager's high-heeled shoes, as she was making towards the door, ceased suddenly, as she stopped short and faced about to Lady Alicia, to see if she were speaking in earnest: and there was certainly no appearance of her ladyship's observations being ironical.

"I never thought you much of a wiseacre, my dear Alice!"—said the old lady, peering into her face, and patting her on the arm with the long bamboo handle of the parasol that served her for a walking-stick. "But I did not fancy that your brother had so little confidence in you as to leave you thus completely at the bottom of the basket!—Miss Barrington refused him ages ago——"

"Refused him?—Refused *Clandon*?—"

"‘Refused,’ (you would say, if you dare,) ‘a Marquis-expectant, of eleven descents!’"

"She was afraid, perhaps, that he was attracted by her fine fortune!"—said Lady Alicia, thinking aloud.

“ No, no, my dear ;—you must fish out some other motive !”—said the old lady.

“ The proposal was made and declined,” added Lady Sophia, “ while Miss Brenton was still the humble Cinderella of Easton Hoo.”

“ *You* were his confidant, then, Sophy ? ”—cried Lady Alicia, in a resentful tone.

“ The confidant only of his wretchedness, at the moment of his disappointment. Had he consulted me beforehand, I should scarcely have advised his risking the proposal ;—so certain was I that it would be useless.”

“ And why, pray ? ”—

“ One cannot always assign a reason for one’s convictions. But, when Clandon arrived one day, unexpectedly, at Warleigh, (while you were abroad,) and told me he was come to acquaint me with the bitterest mortification of his life, I answered at once,—‘ Spare yourself the grief of repeating it: I know all! You want to marry Mrs. Barrington’s pretty niece, and cannot obtain her consent.’ ”

“ And how came you to surmise it? If I remember, *you* were not of that famous party to

Easton Hoo, which was predestined to decide so many destinies?"

"I was one of a still more famous party at Heriford Castle!" replied Lady Sophia, with a smile; "and, not having quite so many calls on my attention as yourself and Eleanor, was at leisure to perceive how thoroughly my brother was engrossed by his pretty Maria. And Clandon, you know, is a man to be in love but once—and for ever!"—

Lady Kilsythe, who had been waiting patiently in the lobby at the head of the stairs, to afford the sisters an opportunity for a few last words, now hobbled back again, to claim the arm of Lady Sophia.

"Good bye, my dear Alice!" was her far from affectionate farewell to the lofty lady of the house. "Make haste and put all your political crotchets out of your head, and try to be a reasonable creature. Leave them to poor Blanche, who, being still in her teens, knows no better, and had set her heart, it seems, on marrying one of the honourable young pen-menders and despatch-spoilers of the nation.

Depend upon it, child, this is no moment in the history of the country for a pack of foolish women to mend matters by whispering in the ear of a foreign plenipo or two ; or exchanging nonsensical notes with some ultramontane Majesty on his travels.—Better stick to your distaff, my dear,—better stick to your distaff!—The finest translation of *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* is ‘No woman beyond her worsted work!’—

CHAPTER IV.

Une dame de grand cœur, qui couve une vindication,
est fort à craindre.—BRANTOME.

EAGERLY did Lady Alicia long to find herself once more in presence of her husband. She had mysteries to unfathom almost beyond the controlment of her powers of discretion; and though no longer on terms with him to push her interrogatories on points which he seemed inclined to reserve, she flattered herself that, from his replies to casual observations, her own perspicuity might enable her to extract the information she was desirous to obtain.

Was he, in the first place, aware of the slight that had been offered to Lord Clandon by his cousin?—The self-command with which he had submitted to her scornful apostrophe at Paris, while possessing the means of silencing her in

a moment by the announcement of his accession of fortune, prepared her to suspect that, though not a syllable had escaped his lips in reply to her frequent allusions to "Miss Barrington's prudence in fixing her residence at once at Hexholm, where she was a person of consequence, in preference to hazarding the eclipse,—the insignificance,—the obscurity,—certain to extinguish in London a person destitute of connexion with the great world," he had been enjoying, all the time, with concentrated malice, the consciousness that, by this obscure and insignificant kinswoman, the heir of all the Herifords had been dismissed as a suitor beneath her notice!—

But this was not all. Lady Alicia's family affection and family pride were so secondary to her self-estimation, that she was prepared to forgive an insult offered to her brother, far sooner than the merest slight levelled at herself. A suspicion had crossed her mind, that, between Eleanor and her husband, she was made a dupe; and, though conscious that she had no great claim on Charles's affection, she

was determined to exact, to the last and utmost, the personal respect which every wife, whose conduct is irreproachable, has a right to claim in her *ménage*.

She had ascertained without much difficulty that the pink note, the original cause of her domestic dissensions,—was from *a* Madame de St. Chamond. On that point, indeed, her husband affected no mystery. In despatching an answer, he had said to the servant, almost within her hearing and as if braving her, “Give this to the servant of the Comtesse de St. Chamond, who is to call for an answer to the letter left here this morning.”

Concluding him to be too well-bred, if not too well-principled, to make a display of correspondence with a woman of disreputable character, Lady Alicia had hastened to inquire of one of the legions of diplomatic *lions* attached to her circle,—*who* was the Comtesse de St. Chamond?”—making the inquiry with the same unmysterious nonchalance that would have dictated a similar question concerning a Montmorency or a Grammont.

“ Who has dared to mention the name of such a person in your Ladyship’s presence ? ”—was the indignant reply. “ *Est-ce qu’on parle de ces espèces-là devant une femme comme-il-faut ?* ”

Whereupon, heartily ashamed of having committed herself, Lady Alicia was glad to drop the subject, and nurse in the secrecy of her heart her wrath against a husband who had so little consideration for his own respectability and hers.

But she was now beginning to suspect that in this correspondence, Barrington had only been the means of communication between the mother and daughter.—Eleanor, who in her girlhood had always spoken of her mother as no more, had perhaps been all this time entertaining with the infamous woman a secret correspondence.—Those beautiful French dresses and flowers by which Miss Maitland had formerly excited the envy of the Ladies de Capell, had doubtless been despatched regularly to her from Paris, by the Comtesse de St. Chamond !

But in making the projected attempt, Lady

Alicia was forced to admit that her pupil had profited only too aptly by her lessons.—Not the shrewdest proprietor of the most petrified face among her diplomatic associates, could have more thoroughly distanced her curiosity than Mr. Barrington, by the frigid reserve into which he retreated against her attack.—The moment she pronounced the name of St. Chamond, he seemed to sink into an icehouse.—

Inexpressibly vexed,—for his hasty retreat from the room rendered it impossible to persist in her interrogatory,—Lady Alicia determined to renew it on some early occasion; and if he again affected solemn airs of discretion, to tax him in plain terms with the intimacy he had formed at Paris with the worthless mother of Sir Wolseley Maitland.

For in Lady Alicia's mind, had long been rising one of those progressive tempests so far more deadly in their results than the angry gust of an hour, soon excited and soon tranquillized.—Though the wretched position in which she stood with regard to her husband, was in a great measure of her own creation, it was not

the less hard to be endured.—Every one might see,—every one saw,—that she was an object of perfect indifference to Mr. Barrington. But this was not the worst. Every one might see,—and every one saw,—that he lived only in the presence of her fair cousin; that, when sunned in the smiles of Lady Mortayne, he was no longer to be identified with the dispirited man who moped in her drawing-room; or whose surly silence was (she trusted) interpreted into indisposition by the illustrious guests whom he never so much as condescended to lift up his voice for the purpose of entertaining.—

Against *this* humiliation, the blood of the De Capells rebelled. In the course of the three short months which constituted her experience of domestic confidence,—a period which, improved upon by a wise and amiable woman, might have been made to last for life,—Charles had vented without scruple his accusations against the coquetry of Eleanor Maitland's character and the shallowness of her heart. But he spoke of her with a degree of bitterness that might have induced a less self-occupied woman

than Lady Alicia to apprehend a relapse.—He spoke from pique, and not conviction.—Even *had* he spoken from conviction, was he not of an age when all the unfavourable prepossessions in the world disappear, like snow in the sunshine, before the smiles of a face so supereminently lovely as that of Lady Mortayne!—

Lady Alicia had no personal experience in that supreme power of beauty which renders the resolves of rational and reasoning man subsidiary to the glance of an expressive eye,—to the symmetry of a beautiful hand. Accustomed to assign the preponderating influence to the charm of what Leonora di Galigai has rendered proverbial,—“the power of a strong mind over a weak one,”—she had yet to learn that even the strongest combinations of the strongest minds may be defeated by the blandishments of a fool with a fair face.—

On this point, however, she was beginning to be enlightened. She saw her Eleusinian *salon*, in all its glory of foreign and native illustration, deserted by her husband, even at the risk of public reprobation, for the pleasure of

sitting silent beside Lady Mortayne in her opera-box ; or of figuring with her in the *étourdissant* whirl of a *valse*, at some fashionable ball !—

If Eleanor (finding Lord Mortayne engaged, —at Tattersall's,—the Tennis-court,—the House of Lords, or any other of the resorts to which a man of his condition occasionally owes himself,) applied to Mr. Barrington to become her escort to some exhibition of frescoes, or flower-show, or riding-party,—an Order in Council would not have prevented him from being in attendance !—

All this weighed sorely upon the heart of one, who had but to look at her own face in the glass, to read the apology which the world was assigning for his conduct.—At that moment, more especially. For it was not, because, as she quitted home for the continent immediately on her marriage, her beautiful Berengaria, (so praised by Sir Wolseley Maitland at Easton Hoo,) had fallen to the share of Lady Mary, that she was debarred from joining their equestrian expeditions.—Early in the autumn she had the prospect of becoming a mother, (an

event so touching to the heart of even the least tenderly affectioned woman!) and she was consequently compelled to privations, for which no compensation was felt to be her due by the resentful husband whom she had so thoroughly estranged.—

Unaware of her situation at the moment of that bitter dissension which, only three months after their marriage, had alienated the heart of her husband at once and for ever, her wounded pride rendered it difficult to communicate the fact to one who would probably regard it as a mere attempt to reconcile herself with one in whom she so unexpectedly beheld a favourite of fortune.—Not an allusion, therefore, had she made to the subject,—however much indisposed,—however fatigued by travelling or exertions in her own house—till nature rendered her situation unconcealable; when, in answer to his expression of a desire to spend the autumn in a foreign tour, she observed that he could not do better,—but that “*she* must remain in England,—since, in September, she expected to be confined.”

Whether the savage rejoinder of "What a bore!"—that escaped the lips of her husband, were expressly intended to punish the haughty obduracy with which she had persisted in concealing the fact, or whether the genuine expression of his selfish calculations, the heartach of Lady Alicia was the same. From physical influences she was now often sad,—often desponding; and even her ambitious spirit was forced to admit that there are moments in human life when human sympathy becomes indispensable; and that the homage of all the Stars and Garters,—*Toisons d'ors* and *St. Esprits* in the world, was poor requital for the want of affectionate female companionship;—the younger sisters cooled towards her by her scornful disposition, and the indifference to their interests she had evinced since her marriage,—and the fair kinswoman converted into an enemy by treachery and fraud.—

It was in a mental paroxysm produced by involuntary recognition of these disagreeable truths, (as she was driving along Park Lane, nearly at the close of the season, on her way home to Arlington street after calling at the French

Embassy, where the intimation of the departure for Paris of the Ambassadors created another gap in the social circle from which the gems were gradually dropping away,) that a feeling of jealousy against Lady Mortayne, almost amounting to frenzy, took possession of her soul.

Feverish and irritable from the oppression of the weather, she had proposed that morning to her husband, (when he visited her drawing-room previous to repairing to his club, to examine the *programme* of their engagements for the day,) to walk with her in the Botanic Garden in the Regent's Park; a promenade so little within reach of fashionable inquisition, as to secure him against being quizzed by her brother Henry or Lord Newbury, concerning the humdrum nature of his *tête-à-tête*.

But to her mortification,—a little, too, to her surprise, (for, since his attentions to Lady Mortayne had exposed them both to the danger of public disapproval, he had been scrupulously courteous towards his wife, as though to deprecate her joining the ranks of the opposition,) he excused himself from the walk.

“Some other day, he should be very happy.

—But he had an engagement from five till eight, that rendered it impossible.”

Involuntarily, his wife glanced from the window across the park,—overhung at that moment by the sort of oppressive haze which, in July, often renders the atmosphere of London as sultry as that of a blast-furnace,—as though to remind him of her peculiar occasion for the refreshment of the lighter climate of Northern London.

But the vapours of Pimlico might have risen around them, black and stifling as from a lime-kiln, and it would have made no difference.—Having announced an engagement and taken up his hat, a London man considers himself entitled to stand his ground against *any* commotion,—his wife, or an earthquake.

Reared in a numerous family, Lady Alicia was little in the habit of attempting any kind of expedition alone.—To *her*, such an exertion appeared as impossible as it was to the unfortunate Princesses, the aunts of Louis XVI., to make their way down stairs without the arm of a gentleman-usher to afford them support. The walk so desired, was consequently abandoned;

and a round of visits adopted instead ;—a round of visits, not of the friendly order that warms and regenerates the heart, but a cold, card-leaving ceremony, purporting to conciliate a few great personages, with whom she was desirous of appearing on friendly terms.—

The last effort of this deposit of crocodile's eggs having brought her Connaught-place-wise, down Park Lane, towards Arlington Street, she was reclining in the corner of her carriage, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, (but, alas ! far more bitter than sweet,)—when one of those groups of pleased and proud equestrians, of which, the preceding season, she had so often formed a part, turned leisurely from Rotten Row to make the round of the ring :—all, admirably mounted,—from the lady who reined, with a grace peculiarly her own, a black barb, well-known by sight to the jealous owner of Berengaria, down to the three or four grooms that followed far in the rear ;—gossiping together with more *à plomb* than even their masters.—

One of the grooms wore the Barrington

livery; a sufficient intimation, even without the sickening consciousness weighing like lead upon her heart, that the cavalier on the off side of Lady Mortayne,—the cavalier in whose favour all the rest of the party were disregarded,—was no other than her husband.

Such then was his engagement!—Such his motive for setting *her* health and comfort at nought!—

At that moment, had the black barb reared and fallen backwards, crushing its mistress in the fall, the cry that might have escaped the lips of Lady Alicia at the terrible spectacle, would have been of exultation rather than pity. At that moment, she *loathed* the triumphant beauty, in the light of whose smiles the enamoured Charles Barrington was evidently content to live and die!—

A moment afterwards, she caught sight of three persons riding exactly at the same distance from the front rank as the grooms lagged in the rear of the whole party;—three men, each of whom had turned the corner of the age defined by Hippocrates as the close of youth; that one of

the three who had overstepped it last, was Lord Mortayne, wearing tokens of a far more advanced age than his elder companions Lord Bowbridge and Sir Alan Harkesley.

All three, however, exhibited unmistakeable symptoms of that decrepitude of heart and soul (more oppressive than the weariness of mere age,) which besets, at the close of the season, the *blasés*, or *dévastés*, or *ennuyés*, or whatever may be the term in fashion for those who are sick to surfeiting of the good things of this world :—and who, at the end of July, having eaten and drunk of all that is most out of season, and heard and done all that is most out of reason, for some weeks preceding,—having exhausted the excitement of the Derby, the Oaks, the Ascot cup, and the new ballet,—fall back upon themselves under the oppression of the dog-days, like a collapsed balloon whose elasticity is exhausted.—

With the perspicuous glance of a woman of the world, Lady Alicia instantly discovered that Mortayne was vainly labouring to find conversation for the other two,—*his* Eliphaz and Bildad,

—who on *their* parts were endeavouring, the one to console him for being married, the other to discover how he managed to put up with it.—

Lady Alicia could perhaps have answered the question to Sir Alan Harkesley, as satisfactorily as his own observations; for she, too, made it her study to ascertain what was passing in the mind of Eleanor's husband.—No one had noticed as *she* had, his air of mournful concern,—as of remorse, not for a crime, but for a fault! No one but herself perceived that in recognising the folly of his marriage, he was far more angry with himself than with his wife; or that he was still convinced that, young, rich, beautiful, highly-connected, she had chosen him for his own sake, and from personal preference.—It had depended on herself to make a better match.—If unhappy, he was not ungrateful.—

Even when noticing with regret, what he must have been blind to avoid seeing, the growing intimacy between his wife and Barrington, Lady Alicia saw, with indignation, that his countenance,—that expressive and elegant countenance,—acknowledged more in sorrow than

in anger his perception of the fact.—It was himself, and not Eleanor, whom he accused.—

“Had this poor girl found me the same eager, fond, devoted, worshipper as at first,” was his sad reflection,—“she would have had no leisure to look abroad for change. But conscious of having been treated like a toy, and prized no longer when the gloss of novelty was worn off, her ear is naturally captivated by protestations that remind of mine, which she hears no longer.—Poor Eleanor!—It is only doubly my duty to watch over her and protect her from harm; and with unwearied care withdraw her from the perils of the world, without alienating her confidence by a show of misplaced severity.”

By degrees, when he saw that, afford what encouragement she might to Charles Barrington, a place was always kept for *him* by her side, to which he was welcomed with smiles as ingratiating as of yore, and that it was apparently in the simplicity of her heart she gave herself up to the flirtation which did her so much injury in the eyes of society,—he redoubled his efforts, not alone to win back her wandering fancy, but to

conciliate in her favour the women of his set, who he saw were beginning to look on with a smile. He condescended to flatter the Duchess of Nantwich,—to gossip with Lady Bowbridge,—and to listen with patience to the affected jargon of half-a-dozen others; only that they might deal mercifully with the poor Eleanor whom he had introduced into the fatal jurisdiction of their tribunal.—

But he did more than all this. He conquered his disgust towards that unwomanly specimen of female nature, Lady Alicia, whom, in former days, during his brief flirtation with her sister, he had detested as hard, *prétentionnée*, and ambitious; and, wherever they met, honoured her by a deference of attention, purporting to leave her no leisure for discovering how completely she was neglected by her husband.—He dreaded the growth of jealousy in such a nature as hers.—He knew that there are certain districts of Arabia, and of human nature, which produce only stones and serpents.—

The manly tenderness of his disposition—that disposition which had rendered “Morty” so

universally beloved,—instigated him, in short, to protect the happiness of her who was gone from him. With the persevering devotion of an Orpheus, he trusted to win back his wife from the gloomy regions of perdition.—

Satisfied, therefore, of her hold over him, Lady Alicia felt that, whenever or wherever she pleased, she had only to mark her desire to converse with him, to retain him by her side. To enlighten his blindness, opportunities for the mischief she meditated would not be wanting.

Lord Mortayne should be placed upon his guard. Lord Mortayne should learn the pure nature of the blood coursing through the blue veins that adorned the ivory skin in which his eyes delighted.—The mother of Eleanor had, doubtless, been described to him, as to others, as having expiated her frailties by death.—He should be taught better. He should be instructed that, in the infamous career that mother was pursuing, she was not only supported by the recognition of the daughter of Sir John Maitland, but that it was by the hands of

that daughter's devoted admirer the illicit correspondence was carried on.

As the group of equestrians disappeared afar off into the haze which even the coppery gleams of the setting sun rendered only semi-transparent, secure and happy in themselves and each other,—talking of operas and ballets,—forced peaches,—*fromage de glace à la rose*,—regattas,—new novels and old flirtations,—

as if earth contained no tomb,

and life no business more urgent than the dinners they were preparing to eat, and the ball at Heri-ford House, to which they were afterwards invited,—an evil eye was fixed upon them.

A heart, as cruel as that of Philip of Spain, or Mary of England, or Ali of Janina, had marked them as objects of vengeance !—

CHAPTER V.

I know them,
And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple :
Scambling, out-facing, fashion-mongering fools
That lie, and cog, and flout, deprave and slander.

SHAKSPEARE.

“WHAT a charming ball !”—cried Lord Bow-bridge, who was apt to find those things charming on which the reflection of his own happy temper streamed like sunbeams on a harvest-field.—“Heriford House is one of the few in London in which people should pretend to give a ball !”—

“I do not agree with you,” rejoined Sir John Hildyard,—to whom he was addressing himself,—as they stood aloof from the throng,—pretty nearly on the spot occupied by Charles

Barrington and the *débutante*, when first introduced to the reader.—“It is a fine old house,—but too solemn for a *fête*. There is a style of old-fashioned grandeur about it, that reminds one of the British Museum.”—

“Henry!” exclaimed Lord Bowbridge, endeavouring to snatch the arm of Lord Henry de Capell as he just then passed on to the ball-room,—“here’s Hildyard says that Heriford House always puts him in mind of——”

“Don’t be a fool, Bowbridge!”—rejoined Sir John Hildyard, quietly drawing him back to his place, while Lord Henry, after a staring look of wonder at being thus roughly seized upon, passed hastily on—“Henry de Capell is too wise to listen to any one’s impertinence but his own!”—

“What you said was not impertinent, my dear fellow, but pertinent.”

“The greater the truth, you know, the greater the libel!—Seriously, this house *does* strike me as totally incongruous with Jullien’s band. The heavy-painted ball-room, with its sprawling gods and goddesses, looks as if nothing

but minuets should be danced under its domed ceiling. Even leaning against these gilded window-shutters, it seems as though we ought to be criticizing the measures of Lord North rather than of Sir Robert Peel; or at least of t'other Sir Robert—the Sir Robert who bought his adherents instead of selling them, like him we wot of!”—

“Ha, ha, ha! Alfred, what do you think Hildyard says?—that Sir Robert—”

But again the man who was too open-hearted to keep even a joke to himself, was quietly drawn back to his place.—

“I suspect,” resumed Hildyard, by way of occupying his Lordship’s attention, “that what makes you fancy the ball so gay to-night—”

“Well!—it certainly *is* more brilliant than the balls used to be here, last year!”—

“Exactly!—is the translation to a higher see of Lady Alicia, and Lady Sophia,—who were sad killjoys. Lady Mary is a buoyant spirited creature, with more of the lights than the shadows of human feeling in her face and nature.”

"The pleasantest girl in London,—and I can't think what Wolseley Maitland meant by not marrying her!"—

"He meant, probably, that he found himself happier single."

"Yes—Maitland is one of those fellows who take such confounded good care of themselves, that they end by marrying a chorus-singer!"

"I am not sure that I would not sooner marry a chorus-singer," replied Sir John, gravely, "than a raw-boned termagant, like Lady Alicia Barrington,—whom such animals as Bernardo call 'a fine aristocratic looking woman'—simply because she has features large enough for one of the colossal sphinxes at Thebes.—At the end of such a woman's fingers, I always expect to find the claws of a harpy!"—

"By Jove, old fellow, I am beginning to believe that *you* are the person who set poor Morty against Lady Sophia!" said Bowbridge, in a momentous whisper.

"And what then?"—demanded Sir John, without shrinking an inch from his responsibilities.—"I merely advised him to have those

tremendous teeth of hers drawn before he married;—and asked leave to cool myself sometimes under the shadow of her prodigious altitudes, in cherry-ripe season, when the dog-star was raging !”—

“Precisely!—You quizzed him out of his liking for her;—as you and I and others have done fifty times to fifty other men concerning women who would have made them happy.”

“And which we have left undone, unluckily, about women likely to make them *unhappy* !—Morty’s marriage was scuffled over in the country. But, depend upon it, had I been within reach of him, he would not now be the miserable man you see yonder, looking nearly as ancient as Old Vassall !”—

“I can’t say much for his looks, poor fellow ! But he was never the same man after he returned from the East.”—

“Had he not felt himself an altered one, he would never have *gone* there!—The fact is, Morty was not intended by nature for domestication.—Morty is like Byron, and a vast number of other fine organizations, too fastidious for

his own happiness. Instead of giving himself up to the force of a current or influence of a feeling, he is always stopping short to examine and inquire, and make sure that he is enjoying the right kind of happiness, in the right kind of way. Were he to dream, to-night, of being at the

glorious feast from Persia won ;

or a banquet in

the golden prime of good Haroun Al Raschid,

he would instantly pinch his finger, to ascertain whether he were awake, and so dissolve the spell. Such a man should never marry !”—

“ So he has begun to find out, I fear.—Poor Morty !—Morty is a glorious fellow.—I would sooner almost any thing should happen, than harm to Morty.”—

“ Then tell your beads for him at this moment !”—rejoined Sir John Hildyard, with a smile ; “ for he ‘ lies among the Moors.’—Lady Alicia has bound him down in the chair of torment beside the head of the sofa where she sits enthroned like Semiramis :—*et sauve qui peut !*”

“I shan’t order a mass said to redeem him out of purgatory, on that account!” replied Bowbridge. “Lady Alicia is reckoned an agreeable woman by those who are fond of dry talking;—and Morty is not one of those who cannot swallow Portugal grapes for the sawdust clinging to them.”—

“She can be agreeable enough, I admit, when she has a purpose to gain,” retorted the uncompromising Sir John;—“like the boa constrictor, that slavers its victims to render them the easier swallowing.—But Lady Alicia’s nature is as bitter as quassia! She has never forgiven Providence for making her an ugly woman; and takes her revenge upon God’s better-looking creatures whenever occasion presents itself.—I remember her being punished, when a child at Heriford Castle, for sticking pins into her canary birds! The aviary was getting nearly depopulated, when the governess bethought her of blowing aside the feathers of the dead birds; when lo! they had been converted into pincushions by the fairy hands of little Lady Alicia!”—

“Ugh!—What a trait of character!—Yet it is hardly fair towards grown-up people to recall their childish faults.”—

“So it is always said when the faults convey indications of crime.—But the meritorious qualities of heroes and sages are usually connected by their biographers with early foreshowings, of some kind or other.—Judging the Lady Alicia Barrington of to-day, however, simply by the Lady Alicia Barrington of to-day, I shall not be sorry to see Morty out of her clutches.”—

“By Jove, how white he has turned all of a sudden!” cried Bowbridge, his intention being thus directed towards his friend; “as pale as a newly-joined cornet after his second bottle of claret.”—

“I am glad you call that pale,—*I* call it ghastly!” retorted Hildyard, with a look of grave concern.—And he was about to push his way through the stream of guests dividing him from the sofa, and inquire of his friend whether anything ailed him, when Lord Mortayne, who had suddenly quitted his place, came staggering towards them, with much the pace and gesture

to be expected of the cornet in the plight adverted to by Lord Bowbridge.

He could not, however, readily reach them, on account of the throng pressing to and from the ball-room;—and during that brief detention, had time, in some degree, to recover his self-possession.—

“Push across to this open window, Morty!—I am sure you are not well.—The room is disgustingly hot!” said Bowbridge, extending his arm between two stuffy dowagers, to assist in drawing Lord Mortayne towards the cooler spot where they were standing.

“Thanks!”—faltered Morty, merging through the aperture thus made. “But I am so overcome by the heat, that I had better go home. Will you be kind enough to explain this to Lady Mortayne, if you see her looking for me?—But beg her, on no account, to leave the ball before her usual time. All I want is fresh air.”

The lips that uttered these few words were so blue, and the eyes that shunned to encounter those of Hildyard and Bowbridge, seemed suddenly to have so sunk in their orbits, that the

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latter, pressing his way through dowagers and all other obstacles, was by his side in a moment to offer his arm.—

“ Let me help you to find your carriage, or some other person’s ! ”—said he ; and as Morty had little strength or breath to resist his good-natured proposal, Lord Bowbridge would not leave him till he had procured the use of the Duke of Nantwich’s chariot, his own not being ordered till three in the morning.

“ Morty talked of the heat of the room and of being in a high fever,” said his Lordship, when questioned, on his return to the ball-room, by Sir John Hildyard. “ But he took off his glove to give money to the fellows who ran to call up Nantwich’s carriage ; and, by Jove, when I shook hands with him as he was getting in, he was colder than marble ! ”

That night, on Lady Mortayne’s return from the ball, she found a note, a *kind* note, from her husband, saying that he had retired to rest with a bad headach, in his dressing-room, which was on the ground floor, that he might not disturb her in the morning by his early rising.

“ He was going to Brighton by the early train, for four-and-twenty hours, hoping that a vapour bath would get rid of his *migraine*; and was desirous of going alone, because they could not both absent themselves with propriety from the Duchess of Gloucester’s concert, the following night.”

This was a relief to Eleanor,—who, hearing he had gone home ill from the ball, fancied that “ ill ” meant angry.—Nothing could be better imagined than his trip to Brighton.—She only thought that two days’ trial of the vapour-bath would be better than one. The message she left for him with the servants, however, was, that, unless he wrote to the contrary, she should expect him home to dinner on the second day.

But, although he did not write, he did not make his appearance. Neither circumstance, however, weighed much on the mind of his wife; for people suffering from *migraine* are privileged to be lazy. He was probably suffering from one of the hypochondriacal attacks to which he was subject;—which *he* attributed to a relapse of *mal’aria* fever, and his wife to a relapse of the

inertness produced by his oriental habits.— Better that he should secure his perfect recovery by the bracing of the sea breeze.

But it was not to Brighton he was gone. That highway of the *ennuyés* of London was not for the stricken deer, who had little hope of the assuagement of a wound like his from the mere levities of life.—It must be healed in solitude. It must be healed by his own efforts; if indeed that bleeding heart were ever again to be made whole!—

Yearning after the solitudes of his northern home, and having secured himself from molestation on his journey by hiring the *coupé* so far as the railway conveyed him on his road, he was a hundred miles distant from London by the time the fair Eleanor opened her eyes to the light of another day, and heard, in answer to her inquiries, that “My Lord, as he had announced the night before, had started for the station at seven o’clock.”—*What* station, was a matter of unconcern both to the lady and the lady’s-maid.

On his arrival at Mortayne, the following

morning at daybreak, where Mrs. Gairey, the head-keeper's wife, who remained in charge of the house, was called out of her bed to welcome and make coffee for her lord,—after complaining, as such persons are apt to do, of not having been warned of my Lord's coming (so that her neglects during his absence might be repaired before they were exposed to the detection of *l'œil du maître*,) the delight of seeing again so unexpectedly the master beloved by every human being in his service, prompted her to add, that “ It put her in mind of old times, his coming unbeknownt like, and taking every body unawarr!”

But on glancing at his face as he reclined in the great library chair embroidered with his arms by Lady Mortayne, (on which Mrs. Gairey had never found leisure, since the departure of the family to place the cover, according to my Lord's express orders), she saw that she must not talk of old times; so different were his Lordship's present haggard looks, from those of the joyous being for whom she used to be called up to make a fire when he arrived

suddenly with some friend, to enjoy a few days' shooting, or sport with the otter hounds of the district.—The life was gone out of him.—The unhappy man before her was but a shadow of Lord Mortayne!—

The sympathizing zeal of poor Mrs. Gairey was at least easier to dispose of than the officiousness of the waiters of a Brighton hotel. When my Lord had intimated to her that "he wished to be alone,—that no one was to be admitted to him,—that no one was to intrude upon him,—that he was come but for a visit of four-and-twenty hours, and wished to be wholly unmolested," his solitude was as secure as in the heart of the great Pyramid.

"No doubt there's been a breeze 'twixt my Lord and Lady, and he be com'd down to cool abit!"—was Mrs. Gairey's soliloquy over the grouts of the mocha she had been brewing. "Well, they han't lost no time;—for whensobe they left the manor, God knows they was as thick as a swarm o' bees!"—

In the course of the day, more than one party of that savage order of tourists who persist in visiting the fields and floods when clad in their

vernal glories, though parliament be prattling and the opera fiddling in town,—were inexpressibly mortified at being answered, on application at the lodge for leave to visit the beautiful pleasure grounds of the Manor,—(one of the lions of Lake-land,)—that “nubbody couldn’t on no account be admitted, ’caus’ my Lord was down.”—And little did those who went their ways, grumbling, conjecture the solace that was afforded to the lord of the soil by the silence of those tranquil shrubberies,—by the soothing voice of the lonely waterfall!—

He had come down, doubting whether he had a right to live,—doubting whether, even if he resisted the desire of his distracted mind to put an end to the struggle of corroding thoughts which, for the last day and night, had tortured him as with the self-judgment of a condemned cell,—by rushing from the retributive justice of his conscience to the tribunal that would render it eternal,—he should have strength of mind ever again to return to his desecrated home,—ever again to afflict his eyes by the sight of his unfortunate wife.

He had never pretended to superior sanctity.

But it was not till the present crisis of his fate he had taken an accurate survey of the thing he was.—Measuring himself by the customs of the society in which he lived rather than by the holy canons he infringed, or the purity of Him in whose sight it behoved him to be pure, he had often assured himself that, if a *roué*, he was no worse than his neighbours.—As a libertine, he was exceeded by the Duke of Nantwich,—as a spendthrift, he was surpassed by Bowbridge; and Harkesley, Lord Alfred, Esher, Hildyard, twenty, fifty, a hundred other men,—were more careless in their duties, and more hardened in impenitence.—

But it was not till now,—when, amidst the social order of modern civilization and under the enlightenment of the Christian dispensation, he found himself guilty of a crime which, even in the lawlessness of the antique world, was represented as the result of some cleaving curse of the elder gods, and visited by the vengeance of the furies,—that he learned to tremble while contemplating the profligacy of his career.—

At first, as he paced along the weedy gravel of

those deserted shrubberies, every object around him seemed tinged with the jaundiced hues of his own meditations.—His pulses throbbed, and the parching of fever was upon his lips. Every sense seemed clogged. Every glance appeared to communicate the nauseous tinge of corruption to the lovely scene around him.

But by degrees, as the summer atmosphere breathed healingly upon his brow, and the beauty and stillness of the landscape argued to his inmost soul of the beneficence of its great Creator who sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust, the despondency of the horror-stricken man gave way. He was able to see extenuation, where before all was dark. His sin had been one of ignorance. He had not *wittingly* taken to his arms the daughter of one who had long abided there in shame.—As to putting away privily the wife to whom this horrible disclosure would doubtless be a sentence of death, it would be a wanton aggravation of every former injury. His motive was one that could not be adduced; and the world, which seizes so readily on the slightest pretext to brand disgrace upon a brow so

fair as that of Eleanor, would doubtless attribute to vengeance against her girlish follies, what was in fact an act of atonement dictated by an unquiet conscience.—No!—he had no right to make her pay the penalty of his fault. He had no right to make her walk barefoot, like the Saxon queen, over the burning ploughshares of human malice.

That young creature, whose life was still before her,—that young creature, for whom the lovely scenery around him, and the birds that were chanting their summer song so exultingly, had still a charm,—*must* not be made a mark for the scorn of the scorner!—

It would suffice that, thenceforward, they lived under one roof, but in estrangement. Eleanor would doubtless attribute his conduct to caprice,—to the wilfulness of a despotic temper, or the peevishness of ill-health.—The truth could never present itself to her unsullied thoughts. She believed her mother to be dead; and to that mother he would address such an admonition, as must render it impossible that the execrable truth should ever transpire further.

For himself, would not his youthful excesses be sufficiently punished by the clinging consciousness eating for ever, like a vulture, into his heart !—

Meanwhile the malicious originator of all this misery, who, in her purpose of mortifying Mortayne by the knowledge of being united to the daughter of a woman still living a life of shame, was far from suspecting of how frightful a visitation of divine vengeance she had made herself the instrument, could scarcely recover her amazement at the degree of emotion her communication had drawn forth.—

In the course of a conversation of which she had herself held the helm, after adverting to the annoyance of being compelled to pass a portion of the autumn in town, she added that she anticipated some compensation from being in Paris by Christmas.

“Paris was the only spot on earth unattainable by the dreariness of winter !—Paris was the only place on earth that reconciled, in their utmost perfection, every physical and intellectual enjoyment. What eating,—what drinking,—

what talking,—what music,—what dancing, and above all, what a charm of *laissez aller*, redoubling all other enjoyments.—Surely, Lord Mortayne,” added she, as if at the instigation of the moment, —“you will take Eleanor to Paris next winter, instead of burying her alive in your family owl’s nest?—But I forgot!” continued Lady Alicia, interrupting herself. On Madame de Saint Chamond’s account, a sojourn in Paris would be impossible.”

At this audacious allusion, a sudden flush rose upon the cheeks of her auditor. For the name of Madame de Saint Chamond recalled to him only a woman with whom, eight years before, he had wasted a Carnival, in the full tide of vain and vicious dissipation.

More angry than hurt at Lady Alicia’s ill-bred allusion, he did not spare her in return.

“The name you have pronounced,” said he—“which I certainly never expected to hear from the lips of a lady in society ——”

“Nay,” interrupted Lady Alicia, “I thought it would be less offensive to *you*, as Eleanor’s husband, than to hear the unfortunate woman

mentioned by the name of Lady Maitland—to which, indeed, by her divorce, she forfeited all title.”—

“Divorce! — *Lady Maitland!*” — ejaculated Mortayne, precisely in the tone of consternation anticipated by his companion.

“Surely you are aware,” she continued, with serene plausibility,—“that the wife of the late Sir John Maitland,—the mother, in short, of my cousins, Sir Wolseley and Eleanor,—now goes by the name of Comtesse de Saint Chamond?”—

“Not *the* Comtesse de St. Chamond?”—reiterated Mortayne, cold dews of horror starting from his forehead.—

“*The* Madame de St. Chamond, I am afraid we must call her, if the name convey pre-eminence in notoriety and vice.—But I refer you to Mr. Barrington upon the subject.—He will convince you with stronger demonstration than *I* can, that Lady Mortayne’s unfortunate mother is still one of the most remarkable—features must I call it?—of the licentious orgies of Paris.”—

Though the groan which escaped the lips of

Mortayne at this intimation, was only precisely what she expected,—like the burst of agony which a surgeon is prepared to hear from the lips of his patient during some agonizing operation,—Lady Alicia felt a little alarmed on seeing him rise suddenly and stagger across the room to Hildyard and Bowbridge ; then, leaning on the arm of the latter, quit the spot. She was afraid lest, in the height of his anguish, he might betray himself,—and with himself *her* ;—for to what other person could he ascribe the information he had received ?

She began to repent, too, having referred him to her husband. What would be the exasperation of Mr. Barrington, if appealed to for confirmation of a fact so injurious to the credit and interests of his idolized Eleanor !—

At all events, it was indispensable to be beforehand with the possibility of such an evil ; and when, the following day, Charles Barrington was going through his quotidian ceremony of inquiring their engagements, with the best intention of breaking as many as decency would allow of those they had to fulfil together,—

Lady Alicia expressed a wish to go the following evening to the French Play, solely as a pretext to add,—“I want to see the new actress,—Madame de Saint Felix—Saint Marc—*Saint Chamond*,—what is her name?—All those sort of people add a *Saint* to their name,—as Lord Mortayne was observing to me last night.”

“*What* was Mortayne observing to you last night?”—demanded her husband, assuming one of those straightforward attitudes that ensure an explicit reply.

“Simply what I just now stated:—that in Paris, women of disreputable character are apt to call themselves Saint-something, as a *nom de guerre*.”

Her husband looked into her face as steadily as though striving to penetrate the inmost recesses of her brain.

“You are not altogether ingenuous with me,”—said he, at the close of his investigation.—“But with *you*, Lady Alicia, it is necessary I should be candid. It is not often I interfere with your purposes or pleasures; nor have I

a sincerer desire than that you should enjoy to the utmost such satisfactions as my fortune can procure you. But in return, when I *do* express a wish, I expect it to be attended to."

Nervous and conscience-stricken, Lady Alicia uttered not a syllable.—Her genius for retort was overmastered.

"I suspect," resumed her husband, "that by some means or other, you have obtained possession of a secret, which it is important to the happiness of more than one person in whom I am interested, should be preserved inviolate :—especially as regards Mortayne. If *he* should obtain knowledge of a circumstance which *you* perhaps regard only as a subject for tittle-tattle, it must lead to such results as would make the discloser curse the day he was born."

From the conscious air of his wife, Charles Barrington entertained little doubt that the mischief was done.

"Understand, therefore, once for all, Lady Alicia,"—said he, preparing to leave the room,—*"that I make you responsible for whatever*

evils may ensue from disregard of my request that you will never breathe to Lord Mortayne the smallest intimation of the relationship to which you have alluded.”—

He might as well have said, “disobedience to my commands,” as “disregard of my request,” in so peremptory a tone was his intimation conveyed!—For the school of conjugal tyranny in which Charles Barrington had been brought up, had found in him an apt scholar;—and from the moment Lady Alicia subjected herself to his rebukes by placing herself at Paris so completely in the wrong, he had rigorously maintained his advantage.

When left, therefore, to her reflections,—left to the remembrance of her indiscretion, and the apprehension of what might ensue,—her heart sank within her. An object of personal dislike to her husband, there was no extremity of retribution he might not deal upon her; and the prospect of a separation, if not as grievous to her heart as to any other woman in her situation, was unspeakably galling to her pride.—The predictions made six months before by her

younger brothers and sisters, (only too familiar with the overbearing nature of her temper,) that "Alice, and the handsome husband so much younger than herself, whom she had chosen to marry, would not live together a year," recurred vexatiously to her memory; till in her panic of anxiety, she almost doubted whether it might not be better to avow all to her husband, and afford Lady Mortayne a chance of averting whatever evils he foresaw from her rash disclosure.

But no!—bold as she was in some things, Lady Alicia wanted courage to tell the truth.—To make what might appear an apologetic confession to Eleanor, was a sacrifice greater than even her fears.

CHAPTER VI.

Love follows not desert, but accident,
We love, because we love : I know no more.
'Tis not great thoughts, nor noble qualities,
Nor conduct pure, compel it. These rather challenge
Our deep respect than Love. That sweet emotion
Owes to our tender hearts its gentle force,
And scorns all meaner reason.

PROCTOR.

WHILE the paths of these favourites of Fortune were perplexed by thorns of their own planting, and tares of their own sowing, there was not a cloud to intercept the sunshine streaming as with the favour of Heaven upon the roof of Hexholm Hall.

The active duties awaiting the young heiress on her accession of fortune, had cut short at once those dangerous reveries — the sunken rocks so perilous to the female heart. Thence-

forward, she had little leisure to dwell upon the sayings or doings of the cousin to whose fortunes her being seemed attached, as that of the hamadryad to the oak.—There was Mr. Fitzhugh, with his matter-of-fact habits of business, claiming her serious attention.—There were lawyers to be consulted,—stewards to be communed with,—tradesmen to be instructed,—neighbours to be conciliated,—tenants to be listened to;—all the thousand duties, in short, incumbent on a person succeeding to a considerable fortune, and inexperienced in its care and distribution.

To carry out his plans for the restoration of Hexholm, a sum of five-and-twenty thousand pounds had been exempted by Humphrey Barrington from the ulterior settlement of his property, and left to be expended according to the discretion of his executor and taste of his niece. Miss Barrington had, consequently, ample means at her disposal, not alone to complete the furnishing and decoration of the old mansion, but to surround herself with the gardens and conservatories she loved so well.

In the unworthy hands to which the estate had passed when sold off for the benefit of Mr. Barrington's creditors, every thing had been suffered to go to ruin.—Cattle had been grazing up to the drawing-room windows, and a great portion of the ornamental timber destroyed. To redeem the remainder from injury, was her first object. To clothe the property with new plantations, and fringe the outskirts of her farms with the orchards that constitute the wealth of the French peasant, her second.

“I do not desire picturesque cottages or fancy farms,” said she in reply to the bantering of Mr. and Mrs. Fitzhugh.—“But I want to see those around me comfortable and at their ease. I have a selfish object, moreover, in establishing a nursery-ground at Hexholm to supply these orchards. As I am to spend the spring of the year in the country, I wish to render the landscape as cheerful as possible; to effect which, what equals the early and successive bloom of the fruit-trees,—

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty?”

It could not, however, be with the view of enlivening Hexholm that Miss Barrington caused to be traced out under the windows of the western wing in which she had established her private apartments, a certain design of flower-plots sunk in the greensward, with shrubberies branching off fanwise on either side, so as to leave in the centre a view of the park beyond, which the landscape-gardener employed by Mr. Fitzhugh assured her was of the most exploded fashion: "the sort of thing never seen now-a-days, except at some country parsonage!"

But Maria persisted.—She even gave express and circumstantial orders for the grouping of the shrubs and trees; *where* the Portugal laurels should be placed,—*where* the hollies, the ilexes, the mountain ashes, the sumachs, the barberry-bushes, and all the other quaint, old-fashioned greeneries, in exchange for which her more fastidious gardener eagerly suggested American plants, magnolias, and carob-trees.

It was not necessary to explain to *him* that the arrangement she required was copied, tree

by tree, from the spot she had so long and laboriously cultivated at Easton; or that, though the carnations, auriculas, geraniums and fuchsias she insisted on having brought into bloom for the *jardinières* of her apartments, had probably been superseded for years in horticultural distinction by plants of the same species having blossoms as large as sun-flowers or heads of brocoli, and nearly the same vapid or leguminous smell, they were as dear to *her* as in the days when she used to place them triumphantly on the slopings of the old porch of the Hoo, to welcome her cousin Charles with their fragrance, on his arrival from Eton or Oxford.

Much as was done for her, in short, there remained a great deal to be done by herself. Soon after her establishment at Hexholm, and while still engaged in the amusing task of setting in their places the splendid articles of furniture and objects of *vertù*, collected for her uncle by his friend Fitzhugh, there arrived from Madras bales and bales of interesting objects which, for the last twenty years, poor

Humphrey Barrington had been gathering together for the embellishment of Hexholm ;—panelling from Japan, services from Tchin Tchew, vases of enamelled porcelain and hangings of silk, embroidered with birds and flowers in rarest perfection,—such as the extensive mercantile connexion of the resident at Madras enabled him without difficulty to procure.

All these Eastern treasures had to be arranged and disposed of; the aviaries and conservatories to be filled, and the family-portraits redeemed at his brother's sale, by Humphrey's intervention, to be restored to their places.—Every day brought some new occupation,—some pleasant occupation,—some occupation enabling her to unite the duty of submission to the wishes of the dead, with the delight of adorning a spot where the remainder of her days was to elapse in pleasantness and peace.—Not a week but added some new attraction to the many, both natural and acquired, united within the ring-fence of Hexholm.

But there were other, and still more urgent, claims on her time. Thirteen years only had

elapsed since the departure of the Barringtons from their family place;—and the friendships and intimacies of a long-established race had bequeathed permanent traces to the neighbourhood. Several of the county families, nearly connected with them by marriage, hailed with the utmost joy an event that served so unexpectedly to reunite the old estate with the ancient name. A resident family at the venerable mansion was welcomed as a permanent blessing;—for in counties so remote from the metropolis as that of Durham, the duty of annual London-going is by no means obligatory, and in many of the finest houses of the district, the chimneys might be found smoking all the year round.

Among these, the memory of the gentle Mrs. Barrington was held in respectful remembrance.—Even her husband had been, in his Hexholm days, a far pleasanter companion than the surly uncle recognised by Maria; and as their difficulties had not been of a nature to injure others, (every shilling of their liabilities being discharged so as to occasion no person's ruin but their own,) there was no drawback to

the pleasure with which the letters of her kind aunt, recommending Miss Barrington to their friendship as a beloved and adopted child of her own, were received by those who had never forgotten the warmth of Mrs. Barrington's hospitalities, or the sweetness of her disposition.—

But Maria possessed claims to the goodwill of many, stronger than even these.—Little more than twenty years before, her own lovely mother,—a Maria Barrington of less fortunate destinies,—had crossed the threshold of Hexholm Hall to be united before the altar of Hexholm Church with the handsome young soldier whom, in the generosity of her heart, she preferred to the richest of the golden prebendaries of Durham, as well as to more than one estated squire of the county ;—little surmising in how few years after the solemn rite, her happiness was to be annihilated by the premature sacrifice of Colonel Brenton's life at the storming of Bhurtpoor.

Among the elders, therefore, were many who had known and loved her ;—among the poor, many whom she had fed and com-

forted ; and when this second Maria Barrington came among them, looking so like her mother whom they knew to be an angel in Heaven, and so nearly at the age at which she had disappeared from Hexholm, holy illusions seemed to environ her, and a more tender admiration was created in their minds.

Under these favouring circumstances, no wonder if the warmest of welcomes awaited the heiress. She came to a place where she appeared to have been long known,—long expected.—There was a thousand times more sympathy with her *there* than at Easton.

Mr. Fitzhugh, who had celebrated her coming of age in her new home, in the month of March, a week or two after her arrival in the North, could scarcely bring himself to believe, when he visited her at Midsummer, that a three months' residence at the place could have sufficed to work such wonders ; not alone in its completion and improvement, but in establishing its youthful mistress in the regard of every one about her.—There was something in her youth,—in her helplessness,—

in her candour,—and above all, in the name of Maria Barrington,—that recommended her, at once, to every heart.

“Charming,—charming!—This is, indeed, charming!” cried the gratified guardian, on seating himself in the fine drawing-room, which, forming an angle of the mansion, commanded, from the Elizabethan windows of its Western aspect, a view of the wooded declivities shelving down to the noble river that leapt, as for joy, among the rocks of the channel it seemed to have cleft for itself through the ochreous earth,—yet opened, on the Southern side, into a lofty conservatory, that served to double its breadth as well as infuse into its atmosphere the spicy fragrance of oriental climes.—“If my poor friend could only have enjoyed a glimpse of the paradise he had planned for himself, or, at least, if he could but have known how worthily his place would be filled up after he was gone, and how religiously all his little whims and fancies respected!—Poor Humphrey!—He loved to dream of Hexholm; but never did he form a

conjecture of the place, my dear Miss Barrington, perfected as it has been by *you*!”—

Fain would Maria have dispensed with being flattered. She would even have dispensed with being praised. She wanted to hear about London.—Mr. Fitzhugh, whose seat in parliament placed him in collision with all that is eminent in the country, could have told her, had he chosen, so much that she was impatient to hear!—

“I could not persuade my good woman to come down with me *this* time,” said he, at last, in answer to one of the indirect questions she ventured to ask concerning the pleasures of the season. “She pretended, forsooth, that railroads are disagreeable travelling in hot weather; and talked of heat, and dust, and hurry, and a thousand things she would never have taken it into her head to remember, but for the fear of missing a couple of Opera Nights, an Almack’s, and an Ancient Concert!—So it is, my dear Miss Barrington, with even the most reasonable of your sex!—The idea of seeing a garden, while the roses are blooming

and the strawberries ripe, gives a fair lady the shudders!"—

"Mrs. Fitzhugh has written me a much better excuse for not accompanying you," said Maria, smiling, "by promising to come in September, with her children; when the few days you are to give me now, will be converted, I hope, into as many weeks."

"Ay, ay!—I dare say she has made good her story!" cried the good-humoured husband. "But all the same, if she had chosen to come, we might have perhaps persuaded you to return with us, and take a peep at London, now the season is drawing to an end;—that you might judge for yourself of the style in which the young Hopeful on whom you have squandered your property, has been pleased to convert his house into a tavern for 'the nobility, gentry, and others!'—Had he placed the Barington Arms over his door, his calling could not have been more manifest!"

"The newspapers, which are so fond of dwelling on such things," replied Maria, (aware that her cousin was regarded with a jealous

eye by the trustee, who, in his own despite, had seen so large a portion of her income alienated in Charles's favour,) "have duly informed me of the frequency of my cousin and Lady Alicia's entertainments.—But surely, sir, there is no objection to this, so long as it is done within the limits of their fortune?"

"Of *your* fortune!"——

"*Theirs!*—on that point there can be no question. And I can easily imagine that people who are commencing an establishment in London, must lay the foundation of their circle of acquaintance by a little extra hospitality."

"I would not give much for friendship that requires to be dinner-baited!"—rejoined Mr. Fitzhugh.

"I said *acquaintance*, not *friendship*," replied Maria, with a reproachful smile.—"But you must have seen my cousin. You must have frequently met him at the House of Commons?"——

"Your first word was best, my dear Miss

Barrington,—I *am* in the habit of ‘*seeing*’ him occasionally at the House; and he takes care that it shall be as rarely as possible, and at the greatest possible distance. I suspect he feels ashamed of looking me in the face, from knowing how unworthily he fulfils the great and good purposes which your partiality expected at his hands.”—

“You have no *really* bad tidings to give me of him, I trust?” said Maria, her face crimsoned by sudden alarm.

“By *really* bad tidings, my dear young lady, I dare say you imply such iniquities as robbing a church, or overdrawing a banker, or losing thousands at play, or some other act of the modern desperado. No!—Mr. Barrington has done nothing of *that* kind, I fancy. His sins are as decorously committed as those of the burglars, who break into a house in female attire.—The unworthiness with which I charge him, consists in the puerility of his pursuits and luxuriousness of his habits.”

“Poor Charles is even now but four-and-twenty!” pleaded Maria.

“And *you* are three years younger;—and why should his head and heart, pray, be less ripe than your own?”

“Because they have been unschooled by the chastening lessons of adversity!” replied Miss Barrington, more gravely than was her wont.

“Ay!—there I’m afraid you have it! Part of this young man’s faults are chargeable upon your own shoulders. If so homely a simile may be pardoned to an old agriculturist like myself, you have heaped rich manure upon soil that wanted rather the ploughshare and the harrow; and your produce has been a crop of weeds!—Good grain had never been sown in that piece of waste land.”

“There is time yet!” was Maria’s forbearing rejoinder.

“I doubt it, my dear young lady,—I sadly doubt it. If at four-and-twenty, a man’s heart be not open to honourable ambitions,—if at four-and-twenty he be not roused by such noble generosity as yours, to prove himself deserving of your esteem, he will never be worth a pinch

of snuff! Rich or poor, young Barrington has always been a vain, selfish, superficial numskull!—His uncle was at much pains to keep watch over him during his youth and boyhood, and the reports were uniformly unfavourable.—There was no integrity of character in him,—no solidity of mind,—no cordiality of heart.”—

“When you have quite done abusing him,” said Maria, a little relieved by perceiving that her guardian was by no means an impartial judge of the conduct of one whom he regarded as a locust, devouring the property of another, —“I will give you some luncheon. But till you have promised not to mention my cousin’s name again, do not flatter yourself that you will be allowed to taste the famous Hexholm seedlings, which all the hautbois of all your prize strawberry-growers of the Horticultural never approached.”—

And as she expected, the threat prevailed; for Mr. Fitzhugh piqued himself on being one of the first horticulturists of the day.

“I must indeed beg, borrow, or steal some

plants of these, for my citizen's box at Roehampton!" said he, a few minutes afterwards, while the strawberries were still melting in his mouth. "And I am fain to admit, that the espaliers of your rose-garden beat me out of the field. I doubt whether even the far-famed gardens of Damascus ever produced such walls of roses.—But of these, you have no right to be proud.—These, like Rome, were not built in a day."

"No,—they were planted by my poor mother; and my uncle's successors were, I believe, too lazy to destroy them.—Do you remember my telling you in London, that one part of the gardens of Hexholm had been so exactly described to me, that I could lead you blindfold to the spot?"—

"Ay! and I remember poor Humphrey telling me as much at Madras,—and those unfortunate girls of his offering to put it to the proof by a bet, on their return to England;—that England, poor souls! which they were fated never to see.—And, by the way, my dear young friend, one of my errands here is to submit to

you a design for the monument you have commissioned me to erect in Hexholm Church. I have, as you requested, conditioned with the artist, that, when complete, it shall not be exposed to exhibition;—a difficult point I must tell you,—the self-love of the sculptor being almost as hard to convince as the humility of a young lady who shall be nameless.”—

“Thanks, thanks!” cried Miss Barrington, pressing his hand. “I am afraid I must forgive you all your treasons against one portion of my family, in consideration of the friendly zeal with which you execute for me every little office that might be painful or perplexing to myself.”

“You are the adopted child of the friend of my youth and manhood, and whom I vainly hoped would be the friend of my old age!”—replied Mr. Fitzhugh, with moistened eyes, and fervently returning the almost filial pressure of her hand. “I am afraid, my dear, you must have fallen among sorry protectors in this world, to think so much of a little goodwill and a few good offices such as mine.”

“ I possess, at least, *one* friend who, had her means of serving me equalled her will, would never have allowed me to miss the blessing of parental affection!”—rejoined Miss Barrington, feelingly. “ And as you know my affection for her, and have long learned to respect her through the testimony of my uncle Humphrey, I am sure it will give you pleasure to learn that Mr. Barrington has at length consented to her paying me a visit at Hexholm.”

“ Ah! so much the better!—I was afraid that, in spite of the strawberry beds and espaliers of roses, you might be apt to feel lonesome here, before the long summer days were over; and I can’t afford to let you take up for want of company with some Durham esquire, as a partner for life. But why talk, my dear, as if you had but *one* friend in the world? I can tell you I have been famously cross-questioned in London by folks who call themselves your friends! If your showy cousin don’t care to be seen speaking in the House to a squaretoes of my quizzical cut, there are certain county members whom I could name,

who are never better pleased than when they can get at me, for a bit of chat."

"You allude, I dare say, to Lord Clandon," said Maria, with perfect *sangfroid*,—for she would as soon have thought of blushing at an allusion to Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys or old Dr. Forsyth, as to her faithful friend.

"Who will not be Lord Clandon long, I fancy," rejoined Mr. Fitzhugh; "for my family physician, who attends at Heriford House, announces that the old Marquis has not many weeks to live."

"Poor old man!—After all, then, he will not enjoy before he dies the gratification he so much coveted of holding a grandchild in his arms!—Of all his family Lady Alicia alone has married in his lifetime."

"I suspect Lady Alicia's offspring is not exactly the grandchild coveted in the family," replied the man of business; "and I foresee no chance of wedlock for my young friend the county member! It ought to sit heavy on your conscience, my dear Miss Barrington, that the poor old Marquis goes out of the world disappointed!"

“ You have been listening, I see, to the London gossips!”—rejoined Maria, endeavouring to smile. “ I wonder how, to a grave person like yourself, any one ventured to talk so absurdly. But if Lord Clandon should succeed to his peerage, surely my cousin will be inclined to canvass the county of Bucks?”

“ I trust, my dear, you are not going to put such an impertinent pretension into his head?” cried Mr. Fitzhugh, in dismay. “ You don’t suppose that other people think of this young whipper-snapper as you do?—What earthly right has his father’s son to represent a county?—Who ever heard of Barrington of Easton ten miles from his lodge-gate?—if indeed his gate have a lodge to it!”

“ Charles Barrington belongs to an old county family,” persisted Miss Barrington. “ He enjoys a good income. If not a man of genius, his abilities are respectable, which I have always understood to be a sufficient qualification for an unambitious member of Parliament.”—

“ Come, come, come, come! I don’t desire to see you mounted on Eclipse,—but don’t be run

away with by a donkey!"—cried her guardian, smiling. "We want something a *little* better than that; and a plaguy deal better than Charles Barrington. Equity, discernment, and steadiness, are indispensable qualifications. A pretty successor, truly, would you give to Lord Clandon, who is one of the most assiduous members in the House, as well as one of its most thoughtful and studious politicians!—If not an eloquent speaker, he is uniformly listened to with deference. The little he says is always to the purpose,—clearing up some obscure point, or adducing some important precedent. I am assured that government is looking with hope and reliance to Lord Clandon."

"I am sincerely glad to hear it," replied the lady of Hexholm, with so absent an air, that it was clear she was quite content to leave him, whether as Earl or Marquis, to the loving-kindness of government. — A moment afterwards, she was deep in the discussion of garden allotments with Mr. Fitzhugh; who, during the few days he was able to steal from London for his inspectory visit to Hexholm, was obliged to

dispose of every minute of his four-and-twenty hours, with the governmental order and personal activity of a Louis Philippe.—

Meanwhile, the visit announced by Maria was anticipated by Mrs. Barrington with a degree of interest fully equalling her own. During the first few weeks that succeeded the probate of Humphrey Barrington's will, she had despaired of the happiness of ever beholding her niece again. The rage of her husband at his disinheritance was so unbounded, that it was only by the most careful vigilance she prevented his making his rabid animosity a subject of jest to the whole county.

Not even the unheard-of generosity of Miss Barrington towards her cousin, had the smallest effect in softening his resentment. What profited it to *him*?—Charles, who received nothing from his father, had nothing to restore.—Even the thousand a year allowed by his son to his wife, was but adding insult to injury.

It was in vain Mrs. Barrington assured him that the concession was made nominally through her and her son, only from an apprehension

entertained by Maria that, if offered directly and ostensibly to himself, it would be refused. Like a sullen child or encaged beast of prey, he lay growlingly surveying the object which he was too savage to appropriate and enjoy ; nor was it till the long series of emotions she had undergone, and the terror in which she lived, had reduced poor Mrs. Barrington to the brink of the grave, that he was suddenly brought to his senses.—The allowance would die with her ! —It was important that she should survive, to secure so large an addition to his income. One of the first tokens of his relenting mood, therefore, was his consenting to accept the five-hundred pound note she pressed upon him as the first half-yearly instalment remitted by his son ; and promising that, on her convalescence, she should proceed for change of air into Durham, and spend part of the autumn with her niece.—

It was not to be expected that he should accompany her to a spot so fraught with mortification to his feelings ; and quite as little to be desired.—Mrs. Barrington would be doubly

welcome to the neighbourhood of Hexholm, by coming alone; and a thousand times as great a source of happiness to her who loved her as a mother.

“I shall have quite enough to do at Easton, while you are gone!” said the amiable man, who professed to devote a large portion of the sum forced into his grasping hands, upon the reparation of the old place.—“I shall have the workmen into the house the very day you start; and I leave you to guess what would become of our property here if, under such circumstances, we were *both* to abandon the premises!”—

He was, in short, more than satisfied to stay behind and take care that no depredations were committed on his orchard, or turnip fields, or the precious collection of marine stores in his study.—Parsimony was the delight as well as habit of his life.—The petty routine of extracting the greatest possible amount of produce out of his farm and garden, superseded all other considerations; and while Mrs. Barrington was reading aloud some charming letter from

Hexholm, or reciting from the newspaper the names of the distinguished guests of his son, he would often shuffle out of the room,—not in a fit of petulance,—not because angry that they had risen so far above him,—but because “if he did not go and keep an eye on matters, that rascal Watts would neglect to stick the peas and earth the celery; or because it was untold what was wasted daily by the men in cutting the luzerne!”—

Pountney Hill, divided between its desire to tell Mr. Barrington what it thought of him, and the dread of offending so near a connexion of one whom the public voice still foretold as the Marchioness who was to reign and rule, at some future moment, at Greensells, could scarcely restrain the explosion of its amazement, that a man who was father-in-law to such a high-priestess of Brobdignag as Lady Alicia Barrington, should have courage to trot over to Tring, in the open face of day, on such a broken-winded pony, in such a hat and jacket, and such an apology for a pair of boots!—

“They confessed that, for *their* parts, if they

were not so well known in the county, they should be ashamed to be seen stopping on the high road to talk to him.”—

It seemed to be his pride and glory, to make evident to the public that, whatever advantages his son might have derived from his uncle's death, or his own marriage, not so much as a sprinkle of the golden shower had reached his paternal roof.—

As, in the last century, the father of the representative of one of our most ancient baronies (through the female line) was pleased to set up a cobbler's stall opposite to his lordship's residence, bearing the inscription “Boots and shoes neatly mended by Philip T——, father to Lord A——,” it was the delight of the soured recluse of Easton to have it said at the Quarter Sessions, “*Who* would ever take that shabby-looking man for the father-in-law of Lord Heriford's daughter!”—

But from the moment of his wife's departure for the North, neither Tring, nor Pountney Hill, nor even the Quarter Sessions, beheld him again.—An event so trying to his feelings as

being forced to admit into his *sanctum sanctorum* a legion of plunderers in the shape of masons, carpenters, plasterers, and painters, engrossed every second of his time.—His narrow soul was absorbed in hods of mortar and pails of whitewash ! The task of placing the old Grange in a state of habitable repair, which he had undertaken solely as a pretext for accepting the thousand a-year proffered by his niece and wife, “to be expended,” as he said, “on the property settled on Mrs. Barrington,” was one which he commenced in haste, to repent at leisure.—Though he was up before the sun, every morning, to take care that not a minute of the labour purchased with his money was wasted,—and kept open his Argus eyes after dusk, long after the evening workman had lain down in his lair,—he still entertained peevish misgivings that abuses were carried on upon the premises, and plunder carried off.—

He wasted as much time in searching after a rusty padlock that was missing from one of the outhouses, as might have carried him into Durham !—

But this afforded him the solace of saddling his many grievances upon the shoulders of his wife.—“All was Mrs. Barrington’s fault!—Mrs. Barrington had begged of him, at parting, (pretending that it was at the instance of Maria,) the only thing in the shape of a watch-dog he had got about the premises.”

Miss Barrington had forwarded to him, indeed, from London, by way of exchange, a thoroughbred Scotch terrier and a brace of magnificent pointers, which had “made those of Sir Hildebrand Chalkneys sing rather small.—But what use were all these put together, as guards, compared with poor Burr; who would not let a tramper come within five fields of the house; and who would have torn half-a-dozen of those rascally workmen in pieces, sooner than let them make away with his master’s property by filching the staple and padlock from the wood-house door!”—

Little dreamed the poor ragged-coated terrier, in the Elysian fields into which, on his arrival at Hexholm with the traveller, he found himself so strangely translated—even a lambswool rug at

the feet of the gentle lady who had so often interposed to save his bones from the knotted holly stick of his savage master,—that he had already come to be regretted by his tyrant!—But Burr was too happy to recur to the misery and meagre fare of Easton Hoo.—By the cheerful voices of Maria and her good aunt, as they sat together conversing, hand-in-hand, he found that nothing—or next to nothing—was wanting to their perfect contentment.

In Mrs. Barrington's reply to her niece's inquiry, whether she had yet visited Arlington Street, "No, my dear,—Charles is too well aware of my inaptitude for the ways of London life, to dream of inviting me,"—there was a slight tone of chagrin. But all was cheerfulness when she added, "Do not let us talk, however, of Arlington Street. You must tell me about yourself, dearest Maria;—all you have been doing, and all you are about to do.—And when you have told me all this, I want to show you the stockings knit by lame Peggy for the kind friend who has secured the comfort of her old days. But, above all, I want to visit, on

your arm, the scenes I so little expected to see again.”—

It was clear, even to Burr, that no thought of Easton or its tyrant, disturbed the serenity of the two, so happy in themselves and each other.—But neither the faithful dog nor the good aunt, while accompanying Miss Barrington to visit the more picturesque spots of her beautiful domain, or the healthful and well-ordered village in which the wise administration of Mr. Fitzhugh had already wrought wonders, could surmise the consolation derived by their young proprietress from the mere aspect of so much beauty and happiness.—Baffled and thwarted as she had been in early life, and perpetually grated upon by the niggardliness of her task-master, it was something to enjoy, unmolested, even the clear light of day and the flowers sending up their fragrance in the sunshine.—To her, those lovely gardens and that foaming river, were full of companionship.—For her, there needed no gossiping of country neighbours to vivify the solitudes of so delightful a spot.—Like Tasso,

—— from her very birth,
Her soul was drunk with love, which did pervade
And mingle with whate'er she saw on earth ;
Of objects all inanimate she made
Idols, and out of wild and lonely flowers,
And rocks, whereby they grew, a paradise,
Where she did lay her down, within the shade
Of waving trees, and dreamed uncounted hours,
Though she was chid for wandering.

And if all this had been enjoyed among the
straitened landscapes of Easton, how much
more amid the noble forest and river scenery,
and the finely-wooded glades of Hexholm
Park !—

CHAPTER VII.

Je fais chaque jour l'expérience qu'il est impossible d'écrire dix lignes sur quelque sujet que ce soit sans compromettre dix intérêts particuliers, sans froisser vingt amours-propres. Les reproches, les plaintes, les réclamations m'arrivent de tous côtes ; et, chose assez ordinaire, les uns se plaignent de ce dont les autres se louent,—car je reçois bien, de loin en loin, quelques lettres de remerciemens. JOVY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the lateness of the season, Heriford House was still open ; and though the family was delayed in town by a cause no less afflicting than the decline of the old Marquis, to which his physicians predicted a fatal termination, his sons and daughters continued to enjoy, without much compunction, their share of the pleasures of the closing season.—Lord Heriford was a person who fulfilled, with so much dignity and decorum, in all respects, the duties of his station, that he was dying with

the same deliberate propriety he had lived,—so quietly and gradually, as to alarm no one's sensibilities and interfere with no one's pursuits.—With the exception of his own man, a confidential valet, only a few years younger than himself, who rendered a daily account to the Marchioness of the progress of his Lordship's symptoms, not a person in the house heeded the slow sinking of the mercury in the tube.—As an excuse for taking their daily fees, a few harmless potions were suggested by the physicians. But they promised nothing from the result: aware that remedies are not to be found at the druggist's for the fatal malady called fourscore years.—

The Marchioness, wise in her generation (after the wisdom of this world,) and contemplating life from the corner of her family coach, much as an emmet surveys it from behind a pebble in a gravel walk, was labouring hard to settle her daughters in life previous to their total eclipse under the shadow of her dowagerhood; and as Lord Clandon was ever ready and willing, when not engaged in the discharge of his parliamentary duties, to devote the evening

to excite the gentle drowsiness insured to his poor old father by hearing the papers read to him,—Lady Heriford was at leisure to discharge the duties of *chaperon*, which *she* appeared to think of equal moment;—assuring the kind inquirers after her husband, at the *fêtes* she frequented, that “Lord Heriford was going on favourably,”—which, as he was going straight to his grave, was an announcement somewhat equivocal.—But how few of those who inquired, were at the pains of even listening to the answer!—People must be sick and die at a *very* dull moment of the London year, to have much chance of exciting sympathy by their exit!—

The *beau monde* had other objects of solicitude than the decay of nature of one who, having done nothing in public life and no harm in private, had gone through life untalked of. The county of Buckingham, indeed, took the liberty of wondering a little by whom it should be represented, when Lord Clandon was called to the Upper House. But the county of Buckingham was a bumpkin, whose wonderment was of small account; and to the

World, properly so called, it was of course a matter of indifference whether Heriford Castle and its dependencies belonged to William, seventh Marquis of Heriford, or Richard, the eighth.—The World had the daily *déjeûners* of its score of exquisite villas to be scampered after, in barouches and four,—exposing the fairest complexions under the sun to the coolest sun looking down upon the surface of the earth ;—a rash pretence at *al fresco* pleasures on the part of a land which, if it knew what it was about, would never stir from the fireside.—People were driving down to be rained upon, among the charming cedars and magnolias of Chiswick ; or defying the dust of the Brentford Road, that their cold chicken might be flavoured with a glimpse of the azaleas and kalmias of Sion ; while innumerable strawberry-parties at Campden Hill, or Gunnersbury, or Cashiobury, rendered dancing a necessary precaution against the chilly atmosphere of an English summer-day, encountered in the suicidal slowness of muslin or jean.—

Among those vernal pastimes of fashionable

life, a Greenwich party, made up by the Duchess of Nantwich, was the object of some solicitude: *not* to the chosen set which it included; but to the set a degree lower in the scale of exclusivism, whose parties for the same day were spoiled by the embargo laid upon their stars. — Lady Barbara Bernardo, who had as much chance of toleration in the Duchess's *clique* as her husband of obtaining the Golden Fleece, was in despair at finding that Lord Henry de Capell, instead of escorting her by the train to a Cashiobury frisk, had promised to accompany the Bowbridges to the Crown and Sceptre,—several boxes having been engaged at Astley's for the Duchess's party, on their way back to town.—Nor was Lady Mortayne less embarrassed, between her desire to join the Greenwich party, which was an object of general envy,—and annoyance at having to appear there, shorn of her habitual cavalier.—

For between the Duchess's set and Lady Alicia Barrington's, there was as clear a line of demarcation as between that of Lady Alicia and Mrs. Vicary Arable. Among the former,

the characteristic of whose finery was the absence of all affectation, Lady Alicia was voted *prétentionnée* and a bore; and the ceremonious civility with which the self-elected Amphytrion of the *corps diplomatique* was treated by Lady Bowbridge and her Grace, so convinced her that beyond an invitation to their annual mobs their acquaintance was inaccessible, as to have forestalled all attempts, on her part, at nearer intimacy.—

Charles Barrington, however, less skilled than his wife in the tactics and impertinence of the great world, entertained an obstinate conviction that, being on visiting terms with the Duke and Duchess of Nantwich, there was no reason he should not be invited to their more privileged *réunions*; and kept throwing himself in their way, for the chance of getting included in the party with which Lady Mortayne was so preoccupied.

On such points, women are clearer-sighted than men; and Eleanor was as well aware as Lady Alicia, that those by whom the party was projected would as soon have thought of extend-

ing their invitations to the *jeune premier* of the French theatre, as to the Sir Eglamour whom she found so attractive ; and that all the dukes and duchesses of the peerage might dine at his house, without advancing him a step nearer the distinctions he coveted.

But if vexed at having for once to appear without the shadow, the constancy of whose attendance served, she fancied, to enhance her magnitude, her anxiety became infinitely greater when, some days before the party took place, the ball at Heriford House was followed by the sudden disappearance of Lord Mortayne !

At first, his absence appeared a relief.—But on the third day after his departure, Lady Mortayne saw fit to address a letter to her husband at Brighton, (destined of course never to reach his hands) reminding him of the Greenwich party, and expressing a hope that he would be well enough to return to town in time for the engagement.

“ To say the truth,” added the fair Eleanor, “ I do not yet feel on sufficiently intimate terms with your friends, to join them without you ; and

I trust, therefore, my dear Mortayne, to see you by Friday's early train.— If you are prevented coming, write me a line by return of post.”—

No line arrived by return of post; and no counter order was consequently issued for the delicate *chapeau en paille de riz garni en clochettes*, and the dress of pale green silk trimmed with flounces of Brussels lace, which were in preparation to render Lady Mortayne an object of jealousy and *pique* to the Duchess and Lady Bowbridge; whose patronage she resented as so insulting, and whose faces, being a dozen years older than her own, she had no great difficulty in eclipsing.—She had been careful to mention her engagement to Lady Barbara, Lady Alicia, and others still more eager for admittance into the *élite* set in which she was tolerated; and when the appointed day arrived, bringing no Morty by the early train, and no letter from Morty by the post, his wife was more annoyed than she had felt since the day of discovering that the attentions of Charles Barrington were transferred to Lord Heriford's daughter!—

Not that her mind was disquieted by anxiety concerning his health. She was simply angry—not sorry ; and when, early in the day, Lady Mary de Capell came bounding into her room, to ascertain whether there was no possibility of inducing the good-natured Lord Bowbridge to get *her* invited, Lady Mortayne hesitated for a moment about throwing cold water on the project. Any thing rather than drive down *alone* to Greenwich,—bearing her husband's apology, which was no apology at all.—

She was too much in awe, however, of the cool, scrutinizing glances of Lord Bowbridge's wife, to hazard the attempt; and having got rid of the importunate girl by assurances that she had herself given up all thoughts of joining the party, would probably have realized her announcement, had not Charles Barrington, when looking in for a minute, at four o'clock on his way to White's,—observed, “As Mortayne has not made his appearance, *of course* you will not think of joining the party.”

The “*of course*,” and the emphasis with which it was pronounced, decided her.

“On the contrary,” said she, “as I have no

inclination to dine alone, I shall order the carriage."

All that remained for the disappointed man was to take up his hat.—All that remained for the abandoned Ariadne, was to ensconce the *paille de riz, garni en clochettes*;—and when, from under the shade of her white parasol, she kissed her hand to the indignant Sir Eglamour, on her way towards Westminster Bridge, as he was making the best of *his* along Parliament Street to the House of Commons, in spite of his wrath at her perseverance in proceeding where she knew he was not to be found, Charles Barrington could not but admit that never had he seen the face of woman half so lovely.

As she approached Greenwich, however, Lady Mortayne felt almost inclined to turn back. Unsupported by "Morty," she did not feel herself one of the set she was about to join. She had no plea to assign for his absence, —she had no plea to assign for her being so cheerful and at ease while he was away.—Still, confiding in the power of her beauty, she knew

that to one moiety of the party, at least, her presence would be acceptable.

The first person she encountered at Greenwich, lounging near the door of the Crown and Sceptre, with a cigar in his mouth, was Lord Newbury.—

“ You are hours too late for the match, my dear Lady Mortayne !” cried he, hastening to the carriage-door, the moment it stopped,—on pretence of assisting her out of it, but so as to prevent the possibility of its being opened by her servant.—“ By Jove ! how well you’re looking ! —And how tremendously you’re got up !”

“ *Was* there a match to-day ?” she inquired, careless how deeply her listlessness on the subject might wound the susceptibility of a constituent of that great maritime force, the Thames Yacht Club.—

“ Yes, a famous one !—The Mystery, as usual, beat everything to pieces.—Would you like to see my boat ?—The greatest beauty between this and the Nore !”—

“ Thank you — I am afraid I am rather late for dinner—” Lady Mortayne was beginning, but

beginning only to be interrupted by Lord Newbury's eager protestations, that look at it she must and should,—that it was lying at only fifty yards' distance in the river. And so vehement were his gesticulations, and so familiar his attitude as he leaned into the barouche looking full into her face, as to afford some ground for the astonishment with which the pair were contemplated by Sir John Hildyard, who was approaching Lovegrove's to join the Duchess's party.—

On a signal from Lady Mortayne, the steps were instantly let down; and before Lord Newbury could recover his surprise, she was on the staircase of Lovegrove's,—with the view of entering the room as if escorted by Sir John.—

As was to be expected from the lateness of her arrival, the party was already assembled. But both the Duchess and Lady Bowbridge came forward kindly to meet her.—Brilliant with youth and loveliness, she darted into the room like a ray of sunshine; and as they believed her to be accompanied by Morty, who was probably lingering behind to give orders to

the coachman, there was no drawback on the welcome she received.

Seated beside the Duchess, on the shabby sofa which, during the whitebait season, witnesses on an average twenty severe flirtations per week, she was accepting with a smile the compliments of Lord Alfred on the lightness and freshness of her *clochettes*, while Sir Alan Harkesley undertook the severe duty of toadying the Duchess, when Sir John Hildyard, somewhat gravely, approached her.—

“ I am delighted to see you here, dear Lady Mortayne,” said he ; “ for it puts me at once out of my pain respecting Morty. I was afraid he was seriously indisposed.”—

“ Lord Mortayne is at Brighton,” was her reply,—“ I have just been making apologies for him to the Duchess of Nantwich.—I expected him back, till the last moment ; or should have written to beg that his place might be disposed of.”—

“ At Brighton ? ”—reiterated Sir John, evidently much astonished.—

“ He went down for change of air, the day

after the ball at Heriford House," resumed Lady Mortayne. "I am sorry to say, Lord Mortayne still retains his oriental partiality for those pernicious vapour baths!—But I was in hopes that two or three days would suffice to set him up."—

"He was indeed looking amazingly ill at Heriford House," observed Sir Alan Harkesley, who, with the Duchess, now joined in the conversation.—"At one moment, I vow to Heaven I thought he was going to faint!"—

"And no wonder!"—drawled Lord Alfred.—"*Whose* courage or constitution would bear up against a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Alicia,—when showing him her double row of teeth, like an Otaheitan idol!"—

"Are you *quite* sure that Morty is at Brighton?" inquired Sir John Hildyard, in a significant whisper, of Lady Mortayne.—

"Quite sure.—He started on Tuesday by the early train."—

"And I, by the evening. On calling in Brook-street that day (so anxious did I feel concerning his indisposition of the preceding night), the servants informed me that his Lordship was gone to Brighton, and alone;

on which, being really alarmed about him, I resolved to follow. But I can promise you that neither on Tuesday, nor the two following days, did he arrive at Brighton!—I returned only this morning. No one had seen or heard of him.”—

“Most extraordinary!” cried Lady Mortayne, while the three other persons who overheard the communication of Sir John preserved an ominous silence. But any one might have noticed that there was far more concern in the air of Morty’s old friends, than in that of his new wife.—

“Morty was always the most eccentric fellow on earth!” observed Lord Bowbridge, by the time the story reached him.—“He never could do things like other people!—Don’t you remember that day he marched off, as if going to take a walk in the Regent’s Park, and never stopped till he got to the Pyramids?”—

“You will begin to alarm Lady Mortayne, my dear Bowbridge, if you talk in that manner!”—interrupted Harkesley.—“You forget that, in the days you speak of, he was a Knight of Malta.”—

“ I am not the least uneasy,” rejoined Lady Mortayne, who was nevertheless seriously alarmed,—not concerning her husband’s health, but concerning what Lady Alicia might have been telling him.—“ There are moments when the atmosphere of London is sufficiently oppressive to make any one of us start off by the first train,—no matter whither.—Were it in my power, I should like to be in the Highlands this very night !”—

“ But not without intimating your intentions to the friends you leave behind,” argued Sir John Hildyard, apart, to the lady who seemed to take her lord’s absence so coolly.—“ God forbid I should alarm you. But I really wish, my dear Lady Mortayne, you would institute some inquiry, or authorize me to institute some, concerning my friend’s destination after leaving home.—He was so strangely overpowered when I put him into the carriage at Heriford House, that I could scarcely make him out.”—

By this time Lady Mortayne was twenty times more *gênée* than she had ever expected to be on joining the party.—She fancied them all eyeing

her askance, as a monster who had arrayed herself in *clochettes* and Brussels lace while her husband, in a demented state, was wandering about the country,—no one knew where,—no one knew why.—

“If you will come to me in Brook-street to-morrow,” said she, addressing Sir John, in a fit of desperation that gave her courage, and with the sweetest smile she could assume,—“I think I shall be able to satisfy you that you have unnecessarily alarmed yourself.”—

And though the promise was made at random to avert the awkwardness of the moment, it appeared so plausible to all present, that Lady Mortayne obtained the credit of keeping her husband’s secret, rather than the contempt of his friends for the heartless levity of her proceedings.—By tacit consent, they abstained from all further allusion to Morty.—

The party went off as Greenwich parties are apt to go off; every one agreeing that the whitebait was less good than in preceding years, and the wine and attendance execrable; simply because the individuals present were

three hundred and sixty-five days older than the last time they were grilled in the same stuffy room,—complaining of the heat of the same setting sun, and the badness of the same quality of champagne. — Sir John Hildyard made two or three detestable puns, which were heartily laughed at; and said two or three profoundly witty things, which, like the still champagne, were passed over in silence, as platitudes. Sir Alan Harkesley made a butt of Lord Alfred, and Lord Bowbridge of Sir Alan Harkesley; —and by the time a great deal of bad wine had been drunk, and a great deal of nonsense talked, they all got into spirits, and voted that, though the whitebait was less good than usual, it was better than anything else; and that, though the room was hot and uncomfortable, it was pleasanter than the Trafalgar.—They were, in short, in a fair way to protest, on their return to town, that the dinner had been successful, and the party delightful.

There was every chance that Lady Barbara and the Barringtons would pass a miserable night.

Unluckily, Lady Mortayne was placed at table between Sir John Hildyard and Lord Henry de Capell; and to secure herself against being cross-examined by the former concerning her husband, afforded sufficient encouragement to the attentions of the latter, to quicken his perception of the fact that his fair cousin was twenty years younger than Lady Bowbridge, as whose *cavaliere sercente* it was his allotted duty to officiate. As is frequently the case, the homage paid to Lady Mortayne by Charles Barrington had opened the eyes of others to her attractions; and though Lord Henry had seen through the worldliness of Eleanor Maitland sufficiently to resist his mother's desire that he should make her his wife, he was not the man to shrink from a flirtation, when occasion offered, with a pretty woman, because she was the wife of one friend and the object of attachment to another.

It was not in the nature of his vanity to conjecture that he was encouraged only to cover the awkwardness of a woman *embarrassée de sa contenance*; and his attentions were consequently

such as, combined with the forced smiles irradiating the fair face that propitiated them, to justify the air of surprise and chagrin with which Hildyard and Lord Bowbridge, the genuine friends of Morty, contemplated the conduct of his wife.

Lady Mortayne had from the first declined joining the party to Astley's,—eager to abridge the embarrassment of her position, and proceed to the opera, to give so favourable an account of the Greenwich dinner as to excite the envy of her friend Lady Barbara, and drive the already sullen Barrington into a still blacker fit of the sulks. But when Sir John Hildyard, on stepping into his Brougham to follow the Duke and Duchess of Nantwich to the Circus, saw Lord Henry de Capell quietly assume the place vacant by the side of his fair cousin in her barouche, he was so far from supposing that, just as she was getting in, De Capell had asked her to “give him a lift,” in apparently so off-hand a manner as to render refusal difficult without an affectation of prudery,—that he entertained little doubt the *tête-à-tête* was pre-arranged.—

So also thought Lady Bowbridge, on finding herself left with Sir Alan Harkesley *pour tout cavalier*; and it was scarcely likely that her previous dislike of Morty's wife would be lessened by the desertion of her chosen knight.

By these trifling circumstances, Lady Mortayne, in spite of the becoming *clochettes* and Brussels lace, contrived to render herself obnoxious to the whole party. On setting out from Brook-street, she had reckoned too largely, as a fashionable beauty is apt to do, on the charm of her personal appearance; for it requires the experience of years to understand how small a portion of a woman's attraction resides in the texture of her trimmings, or even in the tincture of her skin.

As little did the lovely Eleanor comprehend that the motive of Lord Henry de Capell, in contriving to return with her alone to London, was anything but to prolong his enjoyment of her society. While *she* attributed his *empressement* solely to the influence of the smiles she had recklessly lavished upon him, of her charming *toilette*, and the admiration it had commanded,

all *he* cared for was that the coachman should drive along Pall-mall and up St. James's-street, on their way to Brook-street, for the chance of being seen from the different club windows!

He was prepared, of course, to apprise every soul he met at the opera, that Lady Mortayne had brought him back to town (her husband being in the country). But he seemed so well aware of the value set upon his word, as to know that it might be as well to have eye-witnesses to the authenticity of the fact.

CHAPTER VIII.

Sweet hopes she gave to every youth apart,
With well-taught looks, and a deceitful heart.

POPE'S HOMER.

THAT night, on returning from the opera, Lady Mortayne was apprised that my lord had arrived by a late train, and retired to rest in his room on the ground floor. No servant having accompanied him out of town, it was at present out of her power to obtain further insight into the object of his unaccountable journey; and as she was anxious to join a dinner party at Bowbridge House the following day, which she would not have attempted unsupported by Morty, she was rejoiced to hear of his being in town,—especially as he seemed to have divined her wish of establishing terms of unconjugal distance between them.

Nevertheless, when she woke on the morrow with the knowledge she was once more under the same roof with the man whose honour she had endangered, not by deeds, indeed, but words, by encouraging avowals of admiration of a nature to which no married woman has a right to listen,—she felt conscious and ashamed; and, as the moment approached for their interview, had scarcely courage to make her appearance in the drawing-room.

Since they came to town, their hour of rising being different, she had been in the habit of breakfasting in her own room; the late hours in which she indulged rendering it impossible to continue the domestic system they had enjoyed together at Mortayne. But long before her dressing hour expired, her husband was usually by her side; and now that he neither came nor sent, she knew that something must be amiss.—

Had her affection for him been as it ought, or even had her conscience been clear, she would have been the first to make advances, by hastening down into his dressing-room. As it was, she could only think of the expedient

of veiling her uneasiness under an air of haughty reserve. Offended dignity was the safest mask for her fears.

The consequence was that poor Morty, who had looked forward to that interview in anguish of spirit far more painful than her shallow cowardice, was relieved at once. Had he found her full of tender reproaches, or pale and sorrowful, the task he had imposed upon himself had been beyond his strength.—But her ill-humour steeled his heart, and almost reconverted him into a man of the world.—

“As you doubtless guess, my dear Eleanor, I have been at Mortayne!” said he, with assumed *sangfroid*, when he saw that she did not condescend to question him respecting his movements. “When halfway to Brighton, I reflected that the air of the north was still more bracing than that of the Steyne.—But I did not write to announce my change of plan, partly because intending to return on the morrow, and partly lest you should fancy me bent on interfering with the plans you left with Archer, for the new flower-garden.”

Satisfied in a moment that whatever might have been the real cause of his journey, it was not what she had tremblingly suspected, Lady Mortayne replied in a tone of flighty indifference,—affecting to make as light of his absence as he could desire.

“He ought to have written,” she said; “not to herself, indeed,—for his message had prevented her feeling the least uneasy; but to the Duchess of Nantwich, to excuse himself from the Greenwich party, where his absence had occasioned the awkwardness of an empty chair.”

“I admit it,—I ought certainly to have written!”—replied Lord Mortayne, regretting to find her thus placable,—so great would have been the relief to his feelings had she exhibited a degree of resentment affording a pretext for coldness,—for Morty’s kindness of disposition and natural good breeding rendered, indeed, difficult the ungracious part he had to play. “But I thought,—I fancied,—that, during my absence, you would naturally excuse us *both* to the Duchess.”

“ Had I followed my own inclinations,” retorted Eleanor, pursuing what she considered her advantage, “I should have done so. But surely it was better, for the sake of appearances,—for the sake of avoiding a discussion of your strange absence,—not to create a double disappointment?—Having written to Brighton, (where you gave me your address,) imploring you to return, I——”

“And *did* you implore me to return?” demanded Lord Mortayne, touched to the soul, and attributing her uneasiness and embarrassment to emotions of a tenderer nature than she cared to exhibit.

“Most earnestly!” rejoined his wife, in a whisper whose softness completed his delusion. —And in a moment he flew to her side, unable to withstand the temptation of taking her slight hand within his own. When lo! as he approached her, something in the falseness of the smile under which she was endeavouring to disguise her feelings,—something in the expression of the cold blue eyes she turned upon him, (which Henry de Capell had once

aptly compared to those of Herodias's daughter), something in her whole air, in short, inspired as she was by the unworthy desire of deceiving him,—so reminded him of—*her mother*,—that, instead of fulfilling his intentions, he staggered back across the room and sank into a chair.

It was the first time he had looked face to face upon Eleanor, since that fatal discovery.—He felt,—he felt that it ought to be the last!—At that moment, before he had time to recover himself, or give a colouring to his strange conduct, Sir John Hildyard was ushered into the room.—*Not* with the expectation of seeing Morty,—whom he still believed to be absent from town; but in pursuance to his engagement of the preceding day with Lady Mortayne, who had promised to afford him an explanation of the proceedings of his friend.

On hearing the announcement of his name, Lord Mortayne started up, intending to make his escape through the back drawing-room; for he was in no condition to encounter Hildyard's

scrutinizing eye.—But already, the visitor was in the room.

“The truant is returned, then?”—cried Sir John, on catching sight of him.—And as he advanced towards Morty with an extended hand, he was about to overwhelm him with playful reproaches for the alarm he had occasioned his friends, when the sight of his haggard countenance and hollow eyes suspended the words on his lips.

“My dear Morty,” said he, gently approaching him,—“you have been ill!—You have been seriously ill!”—

“Ill enough!” replied Lord Mortayne, endeavouring to rally his spirits and resume his usual tone, so as to baffle the suspicions his appearance was likely to awaken.—“The hot rooms of London, if you remember, were always fatal to me.”

“Then why, in Heaven’s name, did you risk coming to town this season?—Why not remain at Mortayne?”—

“Human vanity, my dear Hildyard!” rejoined Morty,—his lips almost refusing to utter

the levities so terribly at variance with the feelings he was labouring to repress. "I could not think of shutting up a wife like mine in the country.—I wished, of course, to render myself an object of envy to *you* and all the world."

So strange was the discrepancy between this vaunt and the tremulous voice in which it was uttered, that Hildyard was fully justified in believing him to speak ironically.—But at that moment, a glance of Morty's eye towards the window, showed him that the wife of his friend, whom, in his dismay at the ghastliness of Lord Mortayne's face he had wholly overlooked, was in the room; and the few minutes that ensued, were rendered a little less awkward by the necessary greetings.

"I was afraid you were going to drop my acquaintance altogether, in spite of the satisfaction of seeing my predictions realized!" said Eleanor, extending her hand with a gracious smile, by way of propitiation.—"But now that you *do* condescend to speak and listen to me, let me entreat you, Sir John, to unite with

me in persuading Lord Mortayne to send for Chambers.—You cannot but see how ill he is looking!—Instead of a few quiet days at Brighton, he has been fatiguing himself to death by a hurried journey to the North, to look after his improvements; and, in the present state of the weather, all this has been too much for him!”

Thankful to her for taking the explanation, which he found so difficult, into her own hands, and in so plausible a manner, Lord Mortayne overlooked the fact that Sir John had been an eye-witness of the scene at Heriford House.

“At all events, we must take care of him now we have got him back again!” was the kindly rejoinder by which Sir John Hildyard endeavoured to conceal his suspicions, that all was not so smooth between them as both parties wished him to believe.

“Do you dine to-day at Bowbridges’?” continued he.—And the manner in which the husband and wife looked at each other, evidently without having come to an understanding on that or any other point connected with

their engagements, convinced him that, in spite of appearances, they were still at issue.—Sir John was not much surprised by Morty's avowal that it was the first he had heard of the invitation.

“And what sort of a party had you at Greenwich yesterday?” added his Lordship, twirling the tassels of his dressing-gown, as he rested his arms upon his knees, with an assumption of ease, much resembling that of a passenger pretending to converse on the deck of a steam packet which is beginning to roll.

“Like all other parties of the kind!” replied Hildyard; “more fuss made about it than it was worth.—One has to give up pleasant engagements, and hurry through the dust to dine ill with those with whom it is much easier and pleasanter to dine well at their house in town.”—

Understanding by this remark that Sir John considered the party *fiasco*, whereas his observations applied to Greenwich parties in general, Lady Mortayne thought it due to her *bon ton*

to express a similar opinion. "She had never been more bored,—she was resolved never to repeat the experiment!"—And Hildyard, in whose mind's eye there still lingered the *tableau* of Lady Mortayne's graceful figure and lovely face, reclining in her barouche, with Lord Newbury leaning in and looking full into her blue eyes under cover of the Mechlin flounce of her parasol,—and of Lady Mortayne in the same position, wrapt in her cachemire as a protection against the night air, with Lord Henry de Capell installed by her side with a cigar in his mouth, starting back to town,—set down the lady who professed herself to have been "bored" as a contemptible hypocrite!—

"Do you remember, my dear Hildyard," said Morty, by way of giving a new turn to the conversation, "that charming Greenwich party we had with the Wessexes, five or six years ago, when the Bertinazzis were in England?"

"Five or six years?" interrupted Sir John. "Nine or ten would, I fear, be nearer the mark!—There was poor John L——, and poor

George H——, and poor Lady Maryfield, and several others, who, five years ago, alas! had ceased to exist!”—

Lady Mortayne looked stedfastly out of the window; lest, by meeting their eyes, her looks should betray that she was dying to inquire whether Old Vassal also belonged to this antediluvian *coterie*.

“A charming party, however, it was!” continued Sir John. “Everybody so well suited to each other, as to produce one of the smooth surfaces indispensable to the brilliancy of society. No mistakes, no discrepancies, no breaking up, as yesterday, before the right moment, because the fractions were not judiciously combined.”

“Lord Henry de Capell and Lord Newbury!” interrupted the sonorous voice of the butler, throwing open the drawing-room door, as if expressly to supply an illustration of the arguments of Sir John. And in sauntered two flagrant specimens of a generation, with which Morty and his friend had as little in common as the age of Addison and Swift with that of the Pickwick School. The very mode of

Lord Newbury's gathering himself into a chair beside Lady Mortayne, as if about to play at leapfrog, afforded a justification for the proposal of Hildyard to the master of the house that he would dress and walk down with him to White's;—so offensive was this forward familiarity in the sight of older men.

“How famously you must have been bored, yesterday!” said the young lordling, addressing Lady Mortayne, as soon as the door had closed upon her husband. “You only wanted my governor, to have all the bores in London—” he would have added, but for the presence of Sir John Hildyard. But an expressive glance at the back of his coat, as he stood contemplating a beautiful miniature of Lady Mortayne, by Ross, which lay among the trinkets on the table, sufficiently conveyed his meaning.—“Henry assures me, however,” continued his lordship, “that Lady Bowbridge was in one of her mildest humours, and bit nobody to signify,—except one of the waiters, who was instantly removed to the county hospital.”

“I will thank you not to affix my name to

your wretched jokes," said Lord Henry, with an air of languid disgust, "as an innkeeper makes people swallow his bad wine, by placing a false label on the bottle."

"Why, you know very well, Henry, you told me at Crock's, last night, after the opera, that the party was the flattest thing you ever underwent; that listening to the obsolete twaddle of the Duchess's set was like looking over a pack of old almanacks;—and that the only supportable part of the affair was your moonlight drive home with Lady Mortayne! Now, don't look as if you felt inclined to eat me, old fellow!"—

"Do not alarm yourself," interrupted Lord Henry, with an air of ineffable disdain. "I am no cannibal! Anything *raw* is beyond my powers of digestion!"

"Is that the reason, pray, that you were trying to do poor Barrington brown, last night, by persuading him that Lady Mortayne had given up Astley's for the Opera, at *your* entreaty?" persisted Newbury, a little nettled. "It was expressly to get rid of our friend Henry,

that Charles Barrington took refuge in Lady Coylsfield's box," continued he, turning towards Lady Mortayne. "Lady Coylsfield being one of the ultra-respectables,—a woman who sits through the opera with as solemn an air as a judge at the Old Bailey or a bishop at a visitation sermon,—Barrington knew himself to be safe under the shadow of her skirts from contact with anything of the name of De Capell."

"Much you seem to know of Barrington's politics!" rejoined Lord Henry, shrugging his shoulders. "Lord Coylsfield is his cousin,—the only relation, by the way, he is ever heard to mention, like the one great gun dragged out for saluting on state occasions, in some fishing village. Whenever Barrington wants to cram us, at Heriford House, with the idea that he could get forward in public life, if he chose, he makes up to the Coylsfields, as a pretext for endorsing himself by a connexion which, otherwise, would run some risk of escaping people's recollection."

"I can scarcely imagine a man in Mr. Barrington's independent position wishing to make

a slave of himself in official life!" said Lady Mortayne, with difficulty subduing her rising ire.

"Not if Mr. Barrington's independence were likely to increase with his family," replied Lord Henry, ironically.—"But my worthy brother-in-law seems to be laying the foundations of a dynasty. And by the time there are a dozen little Barringtons crying for cake and wine, any noble cousin on the Treasury bench, whether Coylsfield or not, might prove a useful connexion."

"A cousin of Mr. Barrington's in request,—when Lady Alicia is likely, a few years hence, to have half the cabinets in Europe in her pocket?" exclaimed Lady Mortayne, with a smile still more sarcastic. "Surely she would feel indignant at the imputation of requiring the patronage of any Lord Coylsfield in the land."

"Ay, but it does not follow that Barrington sees with the eyes of his wife!" retorted the reckless Lord Newbury,—who entertained small respect for either persons or things. "On the contrary, I suspect that when it is east by north

with the one, it is west by south with the other. —They have lost no time in finding out the grand matrimonial secret of repulsion !”—

“The world would be a dull one, if so grand an *arcanum* remained a mystery !” said Lord Henry, with affected gravity. “I should look with far more compassion upon the many loving couples exposing themselves to public derision, (such, for instance, as my sister Blanche and Algernon Nebwell,) unless sure that less than six months of matrimony would fully restore them to their senses.”

Sir John Hildyard, who still stood by, in attentive silence, with every reason to conclude from the hollow smiles with which all this flippancy was propitiated by Lady Mortayne, that her visitors spoke under encouragement, took occasion to demonstrate by his cold manner of taking leave, when apprised by Morty’s valet that his lordship was dressed and waiting for him in the hall, his utter disapproval of their modes of speech, and her own habits of life.

“How can you put up with the grave airs of that old blockhead ! How can you support

the company of such a synod of antediluvians!" exclaimed Lord Henry, the moment poor Morty's friend had quitted the room. "I was in hopes, my dear coz, when you married, that *your* influence would have sufficed to render Mortayne one of *us*. It never occurred to me that he would dream of transporting you back into his own obsolete century."

"Lord Mortayne is however some years younger than Lady Bowbridge!"—was the significant retort of the angry Eleanor.

"Ten, at least!—But when did you ever see me flirt with Lady Bowbridge, except as an act of expiation after doing some foolish thing or other,—such as losing my money at *lansquenet*,—or riding a race,—or presiding at a public charity,—or some abomination equally to be—atoned for?"

Lord Henry, who was prolonging his visit by preconcerted arrangement with Newbury, only till what they believed to be the hour of Charles Barrington's daily visits to Brook Street, began to suspect, from the frequent glances of his fair cousin towards the clock on

the chimney-piece, that they had not much longer to wait; when, lo, a very low knock at the street door caused the colour to rise to the roots of her wavy hair!—

Nor was her confusion diminished by the air of uncontrolled ill-humour with which, a moment afterwards, Sir Eglamour entered the room. Attributing to displeasure at finding Lord Henry lolling so familiarly on her ottoman, and Lord Newbury amusing himself by her side with making spills for which he extracted the materials from her *papeterie* with as much coolness as he might have done at home, the surly manner in which he received their compliments upon his snow-white waistcoat and nether garments, (Lord Newbury provokingly inquiring how long he had been sent home from the *blanchisseuse*,) she exerted herself to the utmost to place them on a more agreeable footing.—But though the nods and becks and wreathed smiles of Eleanor Maitland were lavished without reserve, they were lavished in vain.—Lord Henry and his friend were there for the express purpose of annoying; while

Barrington was too seriously annoyed to be placed at his ease by a few playful sallies.

On his way to Brook Street he had encountered Lord Mortayne and Sir John Hildyard;—encountered them, too, at the unlucky moment when Sir John, with the view of probing, for the health's sake of his friend, the secret wound which had produced the singular *escalandre* at Heriford House, was alluding to Lady Alicia Barrington;—a name that recalled so cruelly to Morty's mind the fatal discovery produced by her gossiping, that, on looking up and chancing to encounter the eyes of her husband, it was impossible not to express by the haughtiness of his bow the secret repugnance of his feelings.

Nor was Sir John, who still ascribed to the *liaison* between the fair Eleanor and the man before him, the unconcealed misery of his friend, much more gracious in his salutation.—It was a greeting, in short, as nearly approaching as might be, to a direct cut; and Barrington, conscious with what hopes and expectations he was proceeding to Brook Street, had some pretext

for surmising that his nefarious designs were discovered; and that the strange flight of Lord Mortayne from town was, in some mysterious manner or other, connected with the discovery.

That, in his anxiety to communicate his suspicions to Lady Mortayne, he should all but insult the two prating boys who were prolonging their visit evidently for the sole purpose of thwarting him, was little to be wondered at; particularly by any one who happened to be aware how black a portion of the temper of the tyrant of Easton Hoo was inherent in the fashionable son, whose assumed courtesies of nature were only too superficial.

CHAPTER IX.

And first I note as a thing most noyous
And unto youth a grevous maladie,
Amongis us called love encombrous,
Vexyng alway yonge peple straungèlye.

CHAUCER.

PEOPLE of the world, especially such as, like Eleanor Lady Mortayne, have not yet entered that memorable twenty-first year which is supposed to mark the attainment of discretion, are little apt to stop short in their career of pleasure, for the purpose of weighing in the balance their own conduct, enjoyments, or prospects.

But so much less than a year had elapsed since the *débutante* of Heriford House was compelled to examine and decide upon the chances of her destiny, that it was difficult not to recur to the deliberation and its results. She could not forbear sometimes asking herself what she had gained by her marriage.—

The charming companion foretold by Morty's reputation for agreeability and wit?—Certainly not!—The puppet purchased under the name of Punch had proved a wooden idol!—The distinction in fashionable life which she had expected to derive from the position maintained by Morty in the highest circle of exclusivism?—Certainly not!—She had been made pungently to feel that a ticket of admission to such a *coterie* is not transferable, even between a husband and wife!—The rank of a peeress?—Even *that* was in some measure deteriorated by the want of fortune that negatived her attempts to figure brilliantly in the *beau monde*.—

As to the charm of domestic intercourse to be anticipated from companionship with a man of Lord Mortayne's intelligent mind, equable temper, and affectionate nature,—the charm which endeared him to so large a circle of friends,—*that* she had never ambitioned,—*that* she had never calculated upon;—and disappointment on that point was not of course included among the many causes of her murmurs.

But she was forced to admit that the evil she deplored was of her own creation; that her pique against Charles Barrington had rendered her too precipitate. Overlooking her own heartless coquetry, it was to *him* she ascribed her reckless choice.—

But for his ambitious marriage, she should have abided the chances of another season; and, even if his sudden influx of prosperity had not determined him to offer her his hand, should have formed some other brilliant connexion. The admiration excited by that loveliness of person which, as Lady Mortayne, artists solicited leave to paint, and poets, without leave or solicitation, hastened to sing, must have secured her adorers among that distinguished class of the youthful aristocracy, ever to be found frequenting such classical haunts as the Tennis Courts, the Red House, and Tattersall's. There was no occasion to throw herself away on a superannuated *roué*. She had been rash,—she had been premature.

Had a well-ordered home, in which to pass a tranquil and meritorious life been the object of her ambition, she might still have created it for

herself at Mortayne. But of such a home, she had been sickened at Wolseley Hall. All she desired was a prominent place in the firmament of fashion, calculated to create envy on the part of others, and, consequently, contentment on her own. A round of restless pleasures,—the artificial day of lustres and girandoles,—the soothing of music, blending with whispers of impassioned admiration,—were essential to her enjoyment;—the same tendencies which impelled her unprincipled mother to desert her home and children, and outrage all the ties and decencies of life, inspiring the giddy daughter with aspirations scarcely less dangerous.

It was the languor and *ennui* she had betrayed at Mortayne which first produced the discontents of poor Morty.—It was the failure of *her* spirits which had caused his own to flag. But for the weariness of supplying excitement and interest to one who could conceive them only amid the gaudy throngs of fashionable life, he would never have languished after the companionship of his former friends, or hurried back to the easy sociability of his club.

Piqued, on her arrival in town, by the want

of cordiality exhibited towards her by the Nantwich set, which she chose to attribute to their dissatisfaction at seeing their favourite Benedick united to a wife selected beyond the pale of their exclusivism. She had now confirmed the coldness which the most trifling attempt on her own part would have readily overcome. Her unmeaning flirtation with Barrington seemed to justify their disgust; and their system of tacitly excluding her from their selecter parties, demonstrated their opinion that she could not do better than confine herself to the sphere from which she had been injudiciously extracted, and her predilection for which was *as* injudiciously apparent.

From the day of the dinner party at Bowbridge House, in short, where the estrangement between herself and Morty became manifest to the whole circle of his friends, they seemed to consider themselves exonerated from all further attempts at conciliation. Bachelor dinner-parties were made up for the express purpose of amusing the general favourite, who appeared so dispirited—to some of which, as a plea for

the exclusion of "sweethearts and wives," was assigned a political character;—to others, the plea of sportsmanship. The Duchess, Lady Bowbridge, and the rest of the leaders of the set, made no opposition, when it was confided to them that these unusual efforts purported only to restore to their friend Mortayne the sunshine of mind overclouded by his ill-advised marriage.

Of the conspirators by whom these pleasant parties and cheerful expeditions were got up, Sir John Hildyard was the only one who acted on system, and with *malice prepense*. The girlishness of Lady Mortayne's character induced him to hope that she might be one of those who calculate the value of things only on losing them; and that by seeing less of Morty, and learning how many were disposed to dispute with her the enjoyment of his company, she would come to appreciate the blessing of which at present she appeared so careless.

But Sir John, though a brilliant wit, and man of discernment, knew little of the sex. A bachelor, and on conviction, he had not

studied woman's mind in the more intimate relations of life. His theories were derived from books, or from the less worthy specimens of female nature; and in this, as in many other instances, he was mistaken. A disposition like that of Eleanor required, on the contrary, to perfect its reason, the influence of a superior mind exercised with sufficient authority.

Reared in a school of bitterness, the surface of her spirit was corroded by sarcasm.—The taunts of her father and brother had created in her mind a mean standard of female excellence. From her childhood habituated to mistrust, and accustomed to hear unworthy motives assigned for the conduct of woman, how was she to suppose that, in other households, an altar was erected to the domestic virtues?—or that chastity, and faith in chastity, constitute two of the most powerful bonds of social life? Prepared to consider those levities of female nature the rule, which are in fact the exception, the mere suspicion that she was mistrusted by her lord and despised by his friends, induced her to throw aside even the feeble panoply she

had created to herself, of deference to the opinion of the world.

“Gone to dine at Alan Harkesley’s villa at Hampton Court!” exclaimed Old Vassall, on learning from her, one night at the French play, the cause of Morty’s absence. “Ah! yes, by the way,—I recollect!—Bardonnaye and Odescalchi told me yesterday they were to be of the party: which accounts, I suppose, for our having to wait so long for the second piece. Mademoiselle Lucille was, of course, *en retard*, for, even by the rail, the distance is alarming. But what can induce a fair bride like yourself, my dear Lady Mortayne, to grant a *congé* for these bachelor parties?—Is it *à charge de revanche*?”—

Instead of resenting the impertinent suggestion, Lady Mortayne only smiled her contempt; which the old beau accepted as encouragement to launch into one of his chapters of reminiscences.

“I remember,” said he, “when my friend Spilsby first married, Lady Susan used to keep him padlocked and chained like a terrier, in a

snaffle collar. But before the close of the year, either she got tired of the clanking of the chain, or some one or other (my friend Morty I am afraid), persuaded her that the person who held it was as much a prisoner as the animal it confined ; and so, for her own freedom's sake, Spilsby, poor dog, was set at liberty !"—

“ If you will take the trouble of inquiring, Mr. Vassall,” was Eleanor's haughty rejoinder, “ you will find that neither chain nor padlock has ever been imposed on Lord Mortayne. The Inquisition is abolished.—Slavery is abolished.—Why replace them by martyrdom in married life?—Why debar your friend the society of such persons as Sir Alan Harkesley and Mademoiselle Lucille, since it is clearly that which he prefers?—Would that every one were so fortunate as to be able to choose their own associates, and avoid the companions they dislike !”

The air of disgust with which this apostrophe was delivered, sufficed (as she expected) to drive the decrepid busy-body out of her box. But Vassall's departure did not console her for

the suppressed smile with which her friend Lady Barbara sat biting her lips while listening to his allusions to the bachelor recreations of Lord Mortayne.

To one so vain as Eleanor, the mortification of having her insignificance in her husband's estimation pointed out to the notice of another woman, was more acute, perhaps, than her own discovery of the fact. The pride she had exhibited in her conquest of the all-conquering Morty, rendered it doubly humiliating that the attractions of her youth and beauty had proved insufficient to retain, for six short months, her command over those versatile affections.

Amid the irritations arising from domestic dissensions, or even coolness such as threatened the happiness of the Mortaynes, a confidant is a dangerous thing; the smallest movement or measure suggested by another, being pretty sure to widen the breach. It is worth no one's while to enter so fully into the circumstances and feelings of the parties, even were such an identification with their interests possible, as to enable them to afford useful advice. And

on this account, it was perhaps fortunate that the pride of Eleanor forbade her exposing her griefs and grievances to such counsellors as Lady Barbara or the Ladies de Capell, or any other of her favourite companions as a *débutante*.

But, unluckily, the danger did not stop here. Even the coldest human heart has need of sympathy. Even the proudest nature is conscious of moments when its pangs are lessened by confiding them to an attentive ear. In time, the frequent absence of Lord Mortayne from his uninviting home became too plain to one who frequented the house so assiduously as Barrington, to be passed over in silence. At first, he was inclined to render a circumstance so propitious to his projects, a matter of *persiflage*. But the feelings of Morty's wife were too extensively embittered to submit to derision. She required soothing,—she required pity;—and pity and soothing were lavished upon her with such considerate tenderness, that the whole budget of her grievances was laid open, to excite all the indignation she desired, as well as a secret joy that did not enter into her calculations.

By degrees, her vexations began to appear almost dear to her ; so careful was she to store up every particle of her injuries in the treasury of her heart, to be exhibited at leisure to the sympathising friend who made his daily appearance in Brook Street, to listen and to deplore.—Had he failed her, how dreary would have been the remainder of her day !—Had he failed her, the tears which his kindly counsels enabled her to repress, would have burst forth !—Nature was wreaking her revenge.—The girl who, at the age when love is becoming, had sacrificed the promptings of her heart to the base scheming of ambition, was at length overmastered by feelings, subdued for a time only, that, like an impeded current, they might assume redoubled force.—“ *Chassez le naturel,*” says the adage, “ *il revient au galop.*”—The imprudent wife was atoning, a thousand-fold, for the hard-heartedness of the *débutante* !—

The season had, by this time, progressed into a slow and feeble repetition of its more vivacious strains, resembling the expiring tune of a musical box, which no one is at the pains to stop,

—satisfied that it will soon wear itself out.—People were growing tired of looking at each other, and tired of listening to each other ; unless such well-assorted couples as felt that they could look and listen for ever.—Among these, unhappily, were several to whom looking and listening were unlawful ; but who were not the less content to prolong the diversions affording a mantle to their infatuation.—

Even Heriford House at last closed its window shutters.—The Marchioness, perceiving that neither crowded balls, nor select *déjeûners*, availed to open the eyes of Lady Mary and Lady Blanche to the folly of their flirtation with two portionless younger brothers, obtained a decree from the family physician that her Lord might perhaps derive benefit, and could sustain no possible harm, from removing to Greensells ; where, thanks to the railroad, medical advice was procurable in an hour from town ; and as Lord Clandon was likely to be detained ten days longer by his parliamentary duties, his brother Henry condescended to become his substitute with the invalid.

By these changes, the only house in which she was familiar, ceased to be accessible to the imprudent Eleanor; while, by the loss of Henry de Capell, whose services as an escort were usually at her command, she was left entirely in the hands of his brother-in-law.—And right eagerly did Charles Barrington pursue his advantage!—Whether riding, walking, or driving, they were continually seen together.—

“As the husband of her cousin Lady Alicia, Lady Mortayne naturally sees more of him than of others,” observed Morty, with apparent unconcern, in reply to an observation hazarded by Sir John Hildyard, purporting to modify an intimacy which might become injurious to the honour of his friend.—“Now Lord Henry has left town, she has no one else to give her an arm when I am not at hand.—Clandon, this year, has not so much as shown his face in the world.”

Too well aware of the proverbial danger of interposing a finger *entre l'arbre et l'écorce*, to persevere where the husband himself seemed disposed to discourage enlightenment, Sir John

adverted no further to the delicate subject.— He almost repented his forbearance, however, when, at the instigation of one of those sudden glows of summer weather which even an English July occasionally calls out of the furnace, the Nantwiches set sail for the coast of Brittany ; —carrying with them Morty, whose increasing languor not only caused serious uneasiness to his friends, but who, even by his physician, was ordered change of air.

“Try a cruise, Morty — try a cruise! — Yachting always agreed with you!” had long been the chorus-cry of White’s; and on his stating that “Lady Mortayne disliked sailing,” —instead of finding the plea accepted as contrary to the advice given, his friends unanimously seconded the opinion of the Duke of Nantwich, that, “in THAT case, there could be no objection to Morty’s embarking with him and the Duchess, in their expedition to Cherbourg.”

The person *most* eager, however, in seconding the scheme, was Eleanor. “He was looking very ill. London seemed the worst place in the world for him; and yet, during the touring

season, she should be sorry to encounter the annoyance he had so often described to her from the incursions of the Vandals visiting the lakes. —If he would consent to accompany his friends the Nantwiches in their comfortable yacht, she would spend the interim at Wolseley Hall.”—

Relieved by this arrangement from all further scruples, Lord Mortayne ceded to the entreaties of the Duke; and before the feverish heat of the weather which had improvisated the scheme, subsided, the Southampton train conveyed them to their trim little *Amphion*.

“I would not alarm you so long as we were within sight of shore, my dear Morty,” said the Duke, as they stood out for the coast of France; “but I mean our cruise to be of three weeks or a month’s duration. *We* shall be much better off than pottering at Cowes; and I have medical authority for the conviction, that a complete change of air, scene, and society is indispensable to the restoration of your health.”—

But however sincere Lady Mortayne might have been at the moment, in her announcement of an intention to visit Wolseley Hall, (as she

would have undertaken any other disagreeable duty to secure Lord Mortayne's departure from town, and her own relief from the mortification of witnessing the significant smiles of Lady Barbara, and the expression of Vassall's astonishment, at seeing her excluded, day after day, from the inner circle of exclusivism into which she boasted of admittance,) no sooner was he fairly off,—no sooner was the sailing of the *Amphion* announced among the ship news,—than she discovered the absolute necessity of remaining a short time longer in town.

“Her brother was the sort of person on whom it was impossible for even his nearest relations to intrude, uninvited.—Besides, she had promised her old friend, Lady Essendon, to be at her ball, which would be the last of the season ; Lady Essendon, whose eldest daughter was to be presented at the first drawing-room of the ensuing year, being desirous to lay the foundations of a dancing acquaintance for her benefit, previous to the important event.”—

With Charles Barrington constantly at her elbow, to add “Of course !—You could do no

otherwise,—Lord Mortayne can have no possible objection to your following your discretion on such a point,”—she was not likely to feel irrevocably condemned to the *corvée* of Wolseley Hall.—

The beautiful barb was still, therefore, in constant request ; and the name of Lady Mortayne cited, twice a-week, by the newspapers, in the list of fashionables present at the opera. Nay, she was tempted to join more than one Greenwich party, the ease and gaiety of which fully compensated for the dulness of her first experiment.—

“What a world it is, and what a system of things we are coming to!” said Sir Alan Harkesley, confidentially to Lord Alfred, while waiting for a tumbler of Hock and iced Seltzer-water, one night at White’s, after escaping from a ball-room, where people were dancing as furiously as though that morning the thermometer had not stood at eighty-eight degrees in the shade.

“So long as I can remember, fools were to be found who would dance in the dog-

days!"—was his lordship's philosophic reply, filling himself a glass of the Seltzer-water without the appendix

"Let them dance, and welcome! But you can't say you remember many instances in which people, only six months' married, went on at the rate of the *beau* Barrington and Morty's wife. By Jove, I never saw such a barefaced flirtation! I am not a ball-man;—but I am told it is only ditto repeated of last year. And what was there *then* to prevent their marrying? Barrington has more than twice the income of poor Morty; Lady Mortayne four times the fortune of Lady Alicia. Is it possible that the mere vulgar love of title could influence them to make themselves and two other persons wretched and discreditable for life?"

"Hardly, I should think!" rejoined his companion, calmly setting down his glass. "They probably did not like each other well enough to marry. But there is a wondrous charm in poaching. Another man's preserves always seem to afford better shooting than one's own manor."

Fortunately, perhaps, for those whose honour was most concerned, this modern moral sentiment was overheard by Lord Esher; who, chancing to meet Sir Wolseley Maitland at a dog-fancier's out of whose kennel he was providing himself for the shooting season, inquired with so much significance whether his friend had seen Lady Mortayne since he came to town, that it was impossible for even the most careless of brothers not to inquire further.

"I called yesterday," said he, "within an hour or two of my arrival; but Nelly was out. I expected to hear from her this morning. I dare say I shall find a note from her or Mortayne on my return to my hotel."

"*From Mortayne, my dear fellow?—Why he is gone sailing to the Mediterranean!*"—cried the astonished Lord Esher.

"The Brook-street servants said nothing of it yesterday," observed Wolseley, almost equally surprised.

"They might not think it necessary to mention a fact which the newspapers have published to all the world."

“How was I to know anything about it?—I never read what is called the fashionable intelligence.—But how long has he been gone, pray; and *why*,—and with *whom*?”—

“With Nantwich, one of his oldest friends, who sailed ten days ago.—The *why*, I am afraid, must remain matter of conjecture.”

“And what do you *conjecture*, then, on the subject?”

“That the weather in Brook Street has proved too squally, of late, for a man so fond of a quiet life as Mortayne!”

“Do you mean, my dear Esher, that he and Nelly *disagree*?”—inquired Sir Wolseley, more earnestly.

“It is the only deduction one can draw from the facts of the case.”

“I always foresaw and predicted that no good would come of her marrying a fellow of such dissolute habits as Mortayne!” cried Maitland, beginning to fire up. “But Nelly would not listen,—Nelly would not be warned!”—

“No, hang it,—one can’t say that Mortayne is wholly to blame in the present instance!” retorted Lord Esher.

“Not when he goes roaming about with his old friends, leaving his young wife alone in London?”

“Are you quite sure that his young wife was not the means of driving him away?” persisted Esher.

“For God Almighty’s sake, speak out,” cried Maitland, losing all patience. “You will drive me distracted by all these hints and implications.”

“Nay, there is no immediate cause that I know of for distraction,” was the cool rejoinder of the interfering friend. “Only it is certainly as well you should know that people think poor Morty is made less of at home than he has been accustomed to elsewhere; and that Charley Barrington is seen much too often in his place.”

“‘People,’—‘people!’—why not say *who*, at once!” cried Maitland, excited by this time into a fury of rage. “If any one has anything to advance against my sister’s conduct, why not put his name to his opinion, and address it to some person entitled, like myself, to take notice of the scandal!”

“Because, my dear fellow, nobody is particularly anxious to get shot for what is not his affair; as would infallibly be the case, in your present mood and temper! But I tell you, Maitland, because I feel it the bounden duty of a friend to run some risk, both *for* you and *from* you, that the coolness between the Mortaynes is notorious in London; and that the sooner you create a coolness between your sister and Charley Barrington, the better.”

“I always considered Barrington a sneaking, pitiful puppy!” was Sir Wolseley’s not very apposite rejoinder. “I should have called him to account for the outrageous manner in which he flirted with my sister without offering her his hand, when she was going about with Lady Heriford last season, but from knowing that my consent to the match would be wanting, even if Nelly accepted him! There was always something temporizing and underhand in his conduct, that seemed to call for explanation.”

“There is nothing, at all events, underhand in it *now*!” observed Lord Esher, who, never favourably disposed towards the sister of his sporting chum, seemed little inclined to become

a peace-maker. "Nothing more barefaced than the way in which his attentions are offered, except, indeed, the way in which they are received!"

"I will go to Brook Street this very moment!" cried Sir Wolseley, beckoning a cab from the stand at Hyde-park-corner, which they were leisurely approaching.

"Softly, softly, my dear fellow! Detection is a better thing than accusation," quietly interposed Lord Esher. "By finding the delinquent on the spot, you place yourself at once in the right, in any altercation you may have with Lady Mortayne."

"And when am I likely to find him on the spot?"—

"Certainly not at *this* hour, when he is enjoying his first sleep, after the black-hole-of-Calcutta atmosphere of Lady Essendon's ball! But I will not afford you better information, my dear Maitland, unless you give me your word of honour that you will not do so stupid a thing as get into a quarrel with Charley Barrington?"

"*That* I readily promise;—for it would

afford him too great an advantage over me, as well as confirm whatever misunderstanding may exist between Nelly and her husband. No, no ! it is my sister I shall attack. Having once satisfied myself that your surmise is just of undue intimacy between her and Barrington, I shall exercise all the influence and authority in my power, without violence or even unkindness, to bring her to a better way of feeling. In these cases, as the first step to folly is always taken by the woman, it is but fair to give her a chance of the first step towards repentance !”

“If such be your intentions,” rejoined Lord Esher, “call in Brook Street to-day, about three o’clock. You will find Barrington’s cab waiting in Park Lane ; and its master—”

“Enough, — enough !” — interrupted Sir Wolseley, not choosing to hear, even from the lips of his friend, disparaging allusions to his sister. “My duty lies plain before me.”

CHAPTER X.

Praise her but for this, her without-door form,
(Which, on my faith, deserves high speech,) and straight
The shrug, the hum, or ha ; those petty brands
That calumny doth use :—O I am out,
That mercy does :—for calumny will sear
Virtue itself.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHEN, at the hour agreed upon, Sir Wolseley Maitland turned the head of his hack from Grosvenor Square into Brook Street, he descried, driving from his sister's door, a cab which he had little difficulty in recognising as that of Barrington.—Another moment, and it passed him.—Another moment, and their eyes had met.—And though an exchange of bows ensued, as between ordinary acquaintances, an ejaculation of thankfulness escaped the lips of Maitland, that their encounter had not

chanced in the drawing-room of Lady Mortayne;—conscious that, had the face of Barrington assumed *there* the same impertinent smile of triumph it was wearing as he dashed along the street, it might have been beyond his own command of temper to refrain from knocking him down.

The consequence of this incident was that, instead of entering the house in Brook Street with the composure he had premeditated, every nerve in his frame was thrilling, and every vein inflated with suppressed ire.—Charles Barrington's daily visit had probably occurred earlier than usual.—Expecting her brother, Lady Mortayne had so accurately calculated his time for going out, as to avoid the chance of a collision; for on knocking at her door, Sir Wolseley was admitted without so much as a question asked.

Had he been aware of the portentous paleness with which anger had overspread his face, he might have hesitated to present himself in his sister's presence. But his whole thoughts were absorbed in the man he had

just seen,—so smiling, and so vain-glorious; and, on reaching the drawing-room, the blinds of which were drawn down to create the *demi-jour* essential to the aspect of beauty at that glowing season of the year, and finding his young and lovely sister arrayed in all the costly elegance of her station, and the coquetry which, at that moment, was loathsome in his sight, Sir Wolseley held the hand she extended towards him grasped for more than a minute within his own, while silently measuring her from head to foot, with a scrutinizing and scornful survey that made her shrink into herself.

When at length he released it from his grasp, it was with an abruptness of gesture that caused her almost to fall back upon the sofa from which she had risen to welcome him. As yet, not a word had escaped his lips.—But the whiteness of his features and fixedness of his gaze spoke a thousand accusations.

“I am afraid you are ill, my dear Wolseley?” faltered his sister, alarmed by indications of emotions so unusual.—

“Not *ill*!”—

“The bringer of bad tidings, then?” persisted Lady Mortayne, struck with sudden apprehension that he might be the bearer of some horrible intelligence relating to her husband.

“I know not what *you* are likely to call bad tidings!” rejoined her brother, his countenance assuming a sarcastic expression, which at once relieved her fears. “*Whom* do you care for sufficiently in this world, Nelly, to tremble at the thought of evil having overtaken them?—Neither husband, I fear, nor brother, nor friend!—The only object of your solicitude that *I* am acquainted with, has too recently left your presence to admit of feeling uneasiness on *his* account!”—

“*You* are the first person with whom I have spoken to-day,” replied Lady Mortayne, resuming her composure, and thanking her stars for the prudence which had determined her to decline Charles Barrington’s visit that day, by a note delivered to him at the door,—acquainting him that she was expecting her

brother, and could not see him till that night at the Opera.

“Do you mean to say that Barrington has not this moment left you?”—cried Sir Wolseley, —indignant at what appeared the most audacious hypocrisy.

“I mean to repeat what I said before, that I have received no visitor of any sort or kind. As soon as I was up this morning, I desired to be denied to every one, that I might not be interrupted in case of a visit from yourself.”—

Sir Wolseley, who could have almost sworn to seeing Charles Barrington emerge from his sister's house, and who entertained but little faith in woman's word, from a duchess to a chambermaid, was rash enough to resolve on putting his suspicions to the proof, by ringing the bell.

During the pause that ensued, Lady Mortayne sat silent and shame-faced. For, mistrusting her brother's purpose of interrogation, she was by no means sure that his inquiries might not elicit the fact that Barrington's visits

were of such daily occurrence, as, even that morning, to require her to excuse herself, by a note, from receiving him.

But Sir Wolseley was too deeply moved to be circumstantial. When the bell was answered by the butler, he simply inquired,—so as not to commit Lady Mortayne in presence of her servants in case she had told the truth,—“Pray, did I not meet Mr. Charles Barrington driving from the door just now?”—

“Yes, Sir Wolseley.”

“Did he leave no message?” interposed Lady Mortayne, in order to forestal further cross-examination.

“Only his compliments, my lady.”—

“Should any *other* person call,” added her Ladyship, resuming her tone of authority, “you will follow the orders I sent down this morning by Mrs. Page, and say that I am not at home.”—

The servant had scarcely withdrawn, when Sir Wolseley hurried towards his sister with an extended hand, which she was wise enough to accept as frankly as it was offered.

"I beg your pardon, Nelly," said he, "I sincerely beg your pardon!—This is an ill-natured world; and Mortayne's unaccountable absence has given rise to rumours and conclusions, which involve your reputation more extensively than you suppose."

"So long as those rumours do not injure me with my friends, I care very little about the matter," replied his sister proudly. "As to Lord Mortayne's absence, surely there is nothing *very* mysterious in his having accompanied his old friends, the Nantwiches, yachting, for change of air, because (as no one knows better than yourself) his wife is too bad a sailor to join the party?"—

"A married couple in their first year of matrimony, usually contrive to change the air and enjoy their diversions together," retorted her brother.—"And so would you and your husband, Nelly, had you not made so unsuitable a match. I warned you,—you cannot have forgotten it,—against marrying a man, whose connexions, pursuits, and tastes were too thoroughly established to admit of becoming secondary to your own."—

“You warned me,—but it does not follow that I have suffered from the verification of your prophecy,” rejoined Lady Mortayne.—“My husband has opposed no wish or inclination of mine—The moment he saw me desirous to spend the season in town, this house was engaged for me.—I see whom I like,—I go where I like,—I decline all invitations that are disagreeable to me,——”

“Perhaps so,—perhaps so !—I don’t say that you have not your own way. But had you married a man of your own age,—a man to whom the world was as new as to yourself, there would have been such unanimity of occupations between you as would have prevented the possibility of undue intimacy with a forward jackanapes, like Charles Barrington ; and, consequently, the false importance ascribed to it, at this moment, by the world.”—

“Say rather, my dear Wolseley, ascribed to it by a few idle gossips belonging to a few idle clubs,—for the world knows better !”

“The world can only form its conclusions

from what it sees.—As Miss Maitland, Charles Barrington was your avowed admirer,—as Lady Mortayne, the same familiarity continues.—Are not people justified in attributing the same cause to the same effect?”

“Certainly not!—Mr. Barrington and myself have, in the interim, accepted partners for life. His wife was as much the object of his free choice, as Lord Mortayne of my own.”

“So was my father the choice of our most unfortunate mother!” cried Sir Wolseley, with some acrimony, “which did not prevent her dishonouring *him*, and disgracing and deserting her children!”—

“The allusion, brother, is scarcely gracious,—scarcely *fair*!” Lady Mortayne was beginning. “But——”

“It *is* fair,—it is fair,—it is even necessary!” interrupted Sir Wolseley. “Such a family as ours, Nelly, is regarded by the world with a jaundiced eye. In the blood of the children of a licentious mother vice is supposed to be inherent. Do you think I have never smarted

under the shame of hearing opprobrious epithets applied to women who have outraged the decencies of their sex? Do you imagine that no mental voice whispered to me, all the while, ‘such, even such, is the mother whom, by the laws of God, you are bound to honour?’ I swear to you, sister, there have been moments when my life was not worth a rush to me, after hearing my father indulge, as he used, in those coarse allusions to his miserable wife, which kept ever cankering in my mind the memory of *whom* and *what* I was the son.”

“All this is painfully, *too* painfully true!” replied Lady Mortayne, in the soothing tone his excitement seemed to require. “But I see no reason why it should influence your opinion of my conduct?”

“It does *not* influence my opinion of your conduct! It merely satisfies me, that your conduct *ought to be* twice as circumspect as that of any other woman, to defy the unjust conclusions of society. When I call to mind the misery of my childhood,—the sneers of the servants,—the airs of compassionate supe-

riority of the tenants' wives, the perpetual irritation of my father, (which *your* tenderer years prevented from falling so harshly upon yourself,) I swear I would sooner see a woman in whom I was interested lying dead in her coffin, than incurring herself and entailing upon others, the imprecations earned by a wife untrue to her marriage-bed!"—

Impossible to listen, without emotion, to adjurations so solemnly and earnestly made. Even the frivolous Eleanor heard and trembled.

At that moment, indeed, she felt grateful to God, that she still retained the right of looking her agitated brother honestly in the face. She had been imprudent, but not guilty. It was not even yet too late to secure herself, and those to whom her honour was dear, from the heavy retribution glanced at so feelingly by Sir Wolseley.

The first evidence of her penitence consisted in an unpremeditated avowal that she *ought*, at that very moment, to have been at Wolseley Hall.

"To own the truth," said she, "I was

afraid of encroaching on your engagements, by letting you know that, at Mortayne's departure, I had promised him to pass with *you* the interim of his absence."

"To come down to me at the Hall?—By Jove, that accounts for what puzzled me so the other day, when my steward wrote word that there were several foreign letters addressed to you, lying at Wolseley, which I instantly ordered him to forward hither. But it was hardly fair of you, Nelly, either towards me or your husband, not to realize what you had promised. Better late, however, than never! There appears little probability of Mortayne's immediate return. Leave town, therefore, with me this evening,—tomorrow morning,—when you will! My carriage shall be at the door to take you to the rail, and save you all possible trouble, at any hour of any day you will choose to appoint. I will either accompany or meet you at Wolseley, as you like best."

Unwilling to own how little she saw that was palatable in either arrangement, his sister

contented herself with ceremoniously expressing her sense of his kindness.

“On Monday, however, at the furthest, I must be there !” added he, without much heed to her idle compliments; “for, as you may, perhaps, remember, I am steward of the Hartsonge Races this year, which fall on the second of August.”

“Yes,—Lady Essendon, and one or two other persons told me they were going down for them,” replied Eleanor.—And it afforded some slight hope of modification to the habitual dulness of Wolseley Hall, to know that races were forthcoming in the neighbourhood, as a pretext for bringing people together.

As long as she could remember, Eleanor had heard wonders from their country neighbours of this county solemnity; and having been away from home, as a guest at Greensells, the preceding year, when, as a *débutante*, she was entitled to become an ornament of the gay assemblage, her curiosity and interest were excited by the prospect afforded.

“I have, unluckily, invited Esher and a

few other friends," said her brother.—"Had I entertained the slightest hope, Nelly, of having *you* for my guest, I would, of course, have asked no one without previously consulting you.—But I need not tell you that, while officiating as mistress of the house, you will be your own; and see as much or as little of my guests as you think proper."—

Though sadly afraid that Sir Wolseley's visitors might be of an order to render the latter alternative peculiarly acceptable, Lady Mortayne was not sorry to seize upon so plausible a pretext for her precipitate departure from London. To preside over her brother's party at county races of which he was the steward, sounded almost like the discharge of a duty; nor could Lady Barbara pretend to fancy she was obeying some peremptory matrimonial manifesto, forwarded from Cherbourg; or Charles Barrington suppose that she had taken flight from town, in mistrust of herself.

"You mean, I hope, to prove to the natives that, however fine a lady you may have become,

you have not altogether forgotten that you write yourself *née* Maitland!" said Sir Wolseley, more cheerfully, after receiving her promise to meet him at the Hall on the 31st of July. —"I trust you will go through the whole *corvée*, my dear Nelly,—ball included?—Lord Essendon and I, as stewards, shall be right proud of the countenance of a London *belle* like the fashionable Lady Mortayne!"

On this hint, amidst all her flurry of spirits and struggles of conscience, the vain and giddy Eleanor found time to issue orders that purported to render her irresistible. New dresses were hastily ordered, and the family diamonds presented to her by her brother, instead of being deposited with the banker, became the companions of her journey.

With the petty ambition of a narrow mind, she had always projected to return at some future moment as a guest to the house of her fathers, and overwhelm the country neighbours to whom, even as a girl, she had felt herself so superior, with her consequence as a peeress. But, above all, by her consequence as the wor-

shipped wife of the popular and fashionable Morty; a position which, at the moment of her marriage, she valued far more than the mere precedence of rank; and, had her mind been of a reflective nature, it might have afforded food for painful meditation that, after so short a period of wedlock, she was approaching Wolseley Hall, shorn of the importance to be derived from her husband's presence and support.

But it did not seem to occur to her that the wives of the neighbouring baronets and squires would be less easily satisfied than the magnates of Grosvenor Square, with such a pretext for Lord Mortayne's absence as, that "he was yachting off the French coast with his friend the Duke of Nantwich;"—or that one or two of the kindlier-hearted, who remembered her from a child, and had grieved over her deserted infancy, would whisper to each other, with tears in their eyes,—“Poor thing,—poor *young* thing!—To be so soon neglected!—Pray God that, thus left to herself, she may not be inveigled into the same evil courses as her mother!”—

If, indeed, she noticed that they were occupied in discussing her, it was to surmise that their attention was attracted by the splendours of her bridal lace and the grace of her deportment; fancying her hardened self-possession a wonderful improvement on the blushing inexperience of the damsel of the chintz terrace-room.

On being placed once more in possession of the said terrace-room, by the way, she was a little moved by the feeling manner in which her brother observed,—“ You will find that nothing has been touched here, Nelly, since you quitted it. I had several large parties staying with me last winter; but, not choosing that a finger should be laid on any thing that had been yours, this room, and your old bed-room and dressing-room, were locked up all the time; in order that, if ever you thought proper to come and take possession of them again, all might be still to your liking.”

Howbeit, at that moment coldly revolving in her mind on what pretext to make her appearance in her own carriage at the races, instead of

as a hanger-on upon her brother, she was forced to offer thanks, that sounded affectionate, for his thoughtfulness. Impossible not to admit that, on some points, in spite of his abruptness, Sir Wolseley was considerate and kind; nor was it for *her* to philosophize on the fact that he would probably have been uniformly kind and considerate, had not the better qualities of his nature been nipped and blighted for want of the fosterage of parental love; or that his principles had been undermined by the perpetual scorn and bitterness heaped by his father on a sex which, after the Supreme Being, a good man is bound to hold sacred.

When the race party came to assemble, however, unblinded by sisterly partiality, Lady Mortayne recognised with regret in her brother's selection of acquaintance, grievous proofs of the bad taste sure to result from an unfair estimation of womankind. As in the exhausted receiver of an air-pump a guinea and a feather have equal weight, the judgment of Sir Wolseley admitted no difference between woman and woman, save that between beauty and ugliness,

or the good or ill humour rendering even beauty of secondary account. Provided a girl were pretty or a woman agreeable, he took little heed of those minor distinctions of conduct or caste, which occasionally condemn to ostracism women both handsome, clever, and entitled to a good position in the world. The consequence was, that the parties of which he had spoken to his sister, consisted chiefly of persons who for some discreditable reason or other found it worth while to toady him ;—jewels, far from flawless, in the shape of damsels who pretended, at any cost, to be Lady Maitland, after vainly endeavouring, season after season, to become Lady Anything-else ;—or flirting married women, whose names had been coupled with those of a series of admirers, having thousands a-year and Wolseley Halls at their disposition.

Lady Essendon, who like most of Lady Mortayne's former acquaintance, had found herself all but overlooked by her in town, as of too humdrum a showing for one ambitious to shine in the Bowbridge and Nantwich set, was not a little astonished by the *empressement* suddenly

evinced in the race-stand at Hartstonge by her Ladyship, to assume a place by her side: the motherly Countess being wholly unqualified to understand with what disgust the fastidious Eleanor found herself presiding over a party including such flagrant luminaries of second-rate fashion, as Lady Caroline Dormer, Mrs. Stratton Stretton, and the pretty, witty, pity-that-she's-so-talked-about beauty of a dozen seasons,—Flora Dyrham.—The invisible fence irreverently dividing such people from the brilliant throng with which, to Lady Essendon's unpractised eye, they appeared to be closely amalgamated, (because occasionally admitted on toleration into the mobs of the *beau monde*, and seen night after night at public places of fashionable resort,) was as plain as an iron grating to one so lately schooled as Eleanor in the perspicacities of exclusivism. Though too indifferent to the happiness of her brother to entertain the anxiety that might have been only natural, lest the brilliant Flora should entrap him into matrimony,—or Mrs. Stratton Stretton endanger his peace of mind by her unprin-

cipled coquetries,—she was keenly alive to the disadvantages that must accrue to herself should women of such questionable reputation fasten themselves upon her as intimates. She did not resent her brother's allusions to her own levities of conduct;—she was prepared to forgive him that and every thing else,—except his callousness to her fair fame in exposing her to contact with persons of such decidedly *mauvais ton*!—

Had her pretensions to the curule chair of exclusivism been supported by the presence of her husband, the reputation of Morty both as a wit and an *élégant* might have enabled her to stand her ground, both against the aborigines, and Sir Wolseley's equivocal visitors. But as there was every appearance that the brilliant man of the world was leaving her to amuse herself as best she might amongst her country connexions, while *he* diverted himself among more refined associates,—the guests at Wolseley, of whom she was at such little pains to disguise her disdain, affected in their turn to regard her in the light of Miss Maitland, rather than as the

star of a higher sphere to which it behoved them to be thankful for deigning to shine upon their rusticity.

Lord Esher, and certain other of Sir Wolseley's wild companions, who were of the party, sided, of course, with the fair ones who were at the trouble to contribute their quota to the general entertainment; and the fastidious Eleanor having made it apparent to the whole neighbourhood, at the second day's races, that she was scarcely on speaking terms with Lady Caroline Dormer, and discountenanced Flora Dyrham's indiscreet sallies by fixing upon her the most uncomprehending looks of amazement whenever she hazarded an observation,—a cabal was formed against her, in return, such as rendered it expedient to suffer, during dinner-time, from a severe headache, as a pretext for retiring immediately afterwards to her own room.

“I would not have accepted Sir Wolseley's invitation, had I known Lady Mortayne was to be here!” observed Mrs. Stratton Stretton, almost audibly, the moment she quitted the saloon,—already provoked by having been

forced to place in comparison with the delicate complexion of the still girlish Eleanor all that cosmetics and a dozen seasons of hot rooms had left extant of her own.—“Lady Mortayne fancies herself so very great a personage from having been permitted to leave the print of her foot in a circle where she had only to show herself to be voted below par, and dismissed without a character, that it is insupportable to find oneself placed at the mercy of her impertinence.”

“Don’t call it impertinence, my dear Mrs. Strat!”—rejoined Lord Esher, to whom her observations were addressed.—“Women, I notice, seldom give each other credit for their virtues; whereas with *us*, if a man be a good shot, or a capital jockey, we know better than to dispute his merits.—You ought rather to honour the *constancy* of Lady Mortayne; who submits to get abused for finery and affectation, for boldly shamming a headache as an excuse for getting out of our way in order to indite to her beloved Charley Barrington an account of the *fiasco* of the crack race to-day, in time for to-morrow’s early-post!”

On the hint of scandal thus afforded, it was not difficult for the three slighted ladies to embroider with ingenuity. Each, in her turn, communicated by the "early-post," to some London *confidante*, that "the Wolseley party had been spoiled by Lady Mortayne's wretched spirits, because divided by eighty miles from dear London, and all that it contained bearing the name of Barrington."

The unkindest cut of all, however, was devised by Lady Caroline Dormer;—who, when Eleanor coldly declined accompanying the party to the race-ball without assigning the smallest reason for absenting herself, — (by which, at the risk of offending her brother, she chose to mark her sense of superiority to the whole affair,) explained in an audible whisper to Lord Esher, that it was not to be expected Lady Mortayne should appear at a public *fête*, when the morning-papers announced Lord Heriford to be on his death-bed.—

"But Maitland is as nearly related to the Marquis as his sister?" remonstrated Lord Esher; "and my friend Woll is wise enough not to trouble his head about the matter!"—

“ You forget the *peculiarly* delicate circumstances of the case, as regards Lady Mortayne !” was Lady Caroline’s preconceived rejoinder.— “ She, you know, was brought up as a *sister* with the Ladies de Capell; and as regards Lady Alicia, — is still an inseparable confidante and friend !—Yes ! strange as it may seem,—it would be impossible for *her* to go to the ball ! —The claims of friendship and Lady Alicia are sacred !”—

Attacked *à coup d’épingles* on all sides, exposed to suspicion by the absence of Morty, and reduced to comparative insignificance by the loss of that devoted homage to which she was becoming only too well accustomed, Lady Mortayne began to discover that, hateful as the old Hall had formerly appeared, it was doubly distasteful now that other women had the controlling voice in its arrangements; now that parties were planned on the Lake for the diversion of the sentimental Lady Caroline, or equestrian expeditions in the woods, at the instigation of the knowing Mrs. Stratton; and above all, now that Sir Wolseley had taken to

walking by moonlight on the Terrace with Flora Dyrham, and quarrelling with all who, like Lord Esher, took the liberty of smiling at their proceedings, and prophesying that "poor Woll might, perhaps, find himself in for it, after all."

Humble as was the kingdom taken from her, she could not bear to find herself lapsed into a secondary object where she had reigned supreme. No one *now* looked to her for orders,—no one even profited by her instigations.—There, as elsewhere, she had bound no single soul to her service by personal attachment, because unsusceptible of personal attachment in return.—Neither love nor regard are to be won by seeming;—and those who go through the world endeavouring to create interests for themselves out of the mere gratifications of vanity, find in the end that they have set themselves the wizard's task of twisting ropes of the loose sea sand.

The three showy belles whom Sir Wolseley had invited with the view of creating a sensation at the Hartstonge races, if not without speck

or blemish, or rather if belonging to a class the announcement of whose names creates either a profound sigh or a significant smile, possessed at least sufficient *esprit de corps* to unite in opposition to the scornful lady who chose to fancy that, “because *she* was virtuous, there were to be no more cakes and ale;” and their powers of mischief being as three to one, they contrived to render her thoroughly uncomfortable, by suddenly stopping short in their conversation whenever she entered the room; or, on resuming it the moment they were able to re-unite into a group, in some opposite corner, contriving that, amid their whispers, the name of Barrington should be audible.—It was in short as clear from their deportment as though the word had been expressly pronounced, that they had no patience with an assumption of prudery on the part of the daughter of a Lady Maitland, or of the idol of Lady Alicia’s husband.

But that Eleanor was aware of needing all her brother’s indulgence,—aware that every morning she received a letter from Charles Barrington, affecting indeed only to supply her

in her rustic retreat with the London news; but, in reality, conveying that news in terms which, by persons of limited capacity, might have been easily mistaken for terms of endearment,—she would probably have remonstrated with him on the bad style of society with which he was surrounded; and warned him against the danger of a flirtation with a girl so slippery as Flora Dyrham,—whose three tall brothers were on the watch to nail to the wall, by way of atonement, the first kite they found stooping towards a bird whose feathers had been so often made to fly.—

But she was afraid of provoking a retort. Sir Wolseley was no longer influenced by the tender mood in which he addressed her on his visit to Brook-street. He was not only provoked by her airs towards his friends, but enlightened by the revengeful sarcasms of those friends as to the extent of her flirtation. Convinced that she had deceived him,—convinced that she was still deceiving her husband,—he was by no means disposed to mercy.

It was consequently a relief to all parties

when, after glancing over a few lines of the pompous half-column of the morning paper that announced the demise of "The Marquis of Heriford, Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of the county of ——," no matter what, —the lady of the yachting lord announced her immediate return to town.

"She must lose no time in placing herself in mourning; in order to demonstrate her gratitude towards the family from which she had received so much kindness, by testifying all the respect in her power to the memory of the dead."

"I should have thought, Nelly, your mantua-maker and milliner were capable of relieving you from the trouble of a journey of nearly a hundred miles!" observed Sir Wolseley, coldly, —readily attributing her abrupt departure to the ill-will subsisting between his sister and his friends. "It strikes me, indeed, that you had better have awaited here the return of your husband. But you understand your own affairs best."

"I fear you will find London quite deserted." added Mrs. Stratton Stretton, affecting a smile

of compassion. "From Goodwood, every one proceeded to the Brighton races!"

"I have little fear of finding a few friends remaining," replied Lady Mortayne,—longing to reply that *her* notions of society were not limited within the circle of the sporting world.

"Of course!—The Barringtons, I believe, are to be in town till after Lady Alicia's confinement;—and it will be *so* kind of you to be at hand to comfort her just now, under her severe family bereavement!" rejoined Lady Caroline, too delighted at the prospect of getting rid of one who was so great a restraint upon their diversions, to heed what offence she might give.

"Poor Lady Alicia!"—added she, as the be-coronnetted travelling carriage drove from the hall-door—"Since the days of Henry Bolingbroke, never was cousinly treachery so grossly practised as against *her* by Lady Mortayne!"

CHAPTER XI.

Nothing like the reality of death to recall the frivolous classes of mankind to a sense of the realities of life.

SWIFT.

As the newspapers, with their wonted Dodd-ransacking industry, had duly cited among the noble families placed in mourning by the demise of the Marquis of Heriford, that of Lord Mortayne, it excited no surprise, that her Ladyship should abandon a party assembled on so festive a pretence as County-races, to return to the nearly abandoned metropolis. The baronet, her brother, indeed, though equally a cousin, having been passed over in the list of mourners as too small for mention, Sir Wolseley pursued unmolested his hospitalities to such outsiders of the world of ceremony as the Dormers and Stratton Strettons.—But from the wife of an ancient Baron, stricter propriety was to be expected.—

The London, found by Lady Mortayne on her return, little resembled, however, the London she had left behind.—A hollow sound prevailed in the now deserted streets; and from the closely-shuttered windows of the noble mansion facing her dreary, dusty home, hung long, seedy, yellow streamers, of sickly and scentless mignonette;—while a solitary housemaid, sole denizen of the dwelling lately so brilliant, looked out in helpless idleness all day from her attic window, as if for company sake; or like sister Anne, to ascertain whether any one was coming, and to descry nothing but a cloud of dust.

Ashamed to proceed in quest of air and sunshine to the Park or Kensington-gardens, where none but the Mrs. Stratton-Stretton class of the community fag out the last days of the season on the parched herbage, under a shade scarcely less seared and withered, — Lady Mortayne sat gasping for breath in her dull drawing-room; pondering within herself how far she might venture to resent the conduct of Lady Alicia, to whom—knowing her husband

to have joined at Greensells the family assembled for the Marquis's funeral,—she had addressed an affectionate note, offering to sit with her, or make herself useful in any manner in her power;—to which, a verbal answer was returned of “Lady Alicia Barrington's compliments—At present she sees no company.”—

Satisfied, from long knowledge of her character, that filial affection had little share in her self-seclusion, Lady Mortayne regarded this message almost in the light of a declaration of war. The open strife she had long foreseen as imminent, was, perhaps, about to commence! Lady Alicia had thrown the first stone.—

That the angry Eleanor knew herself to be in the wrong was evident from the pains she took in self-vindication.

“However justified,” was her secret argument with herself, “in resenting the preference which her husband is at no pains to conceal, at least she cannot be blind to the fact that I was the original object of his love; and that she left no means untried to disgust me with Charles as

a suitor, by representing him as a needy impostor, only that the coolness created by her treachery might provoke him into offering her his hand.—Not once did Lady Heriford officiate as my *chaperon*, but Alicia took occasion to spoil my evening's pleasures, by rendering Charles's attentions the object of her ridicule!—And if, as an inexperienced *débutante* in life, I was weak enough to fall into the snare, it is but just that she should pay the penalty of having marred two happy destinies by her own heartless manœuvres.”—

“I suppose you've heard of Henry de Capell's luck, my dear Lady Mortayne?” cried Lord Newbury, stopping her carriage in Regent-street, the day after her return to town, as she was wending her solitary way to Howell and James's, for the purchase of jet ornaments and other items of the luxury of woe.—

“No, indeed,” she replied, tolerating Lord Newbury's familiarity for the sake of his news. “Is he already returned to town?—I fancied Lord Heriford's funeral had not yet taken place?”—

“Not till Saturday. But I heard this morning from Henry.—Henry, who is curious in pocket-handkerchiefs, wrote to beg I would look out for some mourning ones for him. Lord Heriford having left to each of his younger children twenty thousand pounds, instead of the ten they expected, Henry seems to think that *such* a governor is entitled to the broadest of hems!”—

“The Marquis was a very prudent, as well as a very prosperous man.”

“A trump,—a regular brick!” returned Lord Newbury, with enthusiasm. “Fellows who, like me, have had a father, grandfather, and great grandfather on the turf, understand the value of being the offspring of a worthy snob, like old Heriford, who fattened cattle instead of breeding racers; whose notions of a horse were limited to the broad-backed brutes that drew his family coach,—and of play, to a Christmas pool at commerce!—A man who never dined without roast beef, or slept without family prayers!—Just such a squaretoes, in short, as there is the making of in Clandon—I beg his

pardon, in the present Marquis of Heriford. Do you remember, Lady Mortayne, what horrid slow work we had of it, last Christmas at Heriford Castle, between Clandon's Tommy Two-Shoes airs of propriety, and the prison discipline of grandmamma?"—

"I remember only a very pleasant party," she replied—wishing to put an end to a *tête-à-tête*, which, in the nearly deserted streets where hackney coaches had now the crown of the causeway, was beginning to attract attention.

"Oh! you can't have forgotten grandmamma,—for I remember you were one of her victims!" retorted the philandering lordling. "You and I were objects of her especial detestation.—Even her grandchildren were no great favourites,—with the exception of Lady Sophia, who, as I suppose you know, she has adopted as her heir. Much better if she had left her money to Henry!—Henry would have made it spin. And where's the use of fortune to an ugly girl like that,—whom, in spite of her seventy thousand pounds, (but not in spite of her teeth,) a man would as soon think of

marrying, as of proposing to the effigy of Queen Anne.”—

Seventy thousand pounds!—After all, then, Lord Mortayne had missed in the charming woman so much attached to him, an excellent match, as well as the best assorted wife! The conscious Eleanor could now understand the drift of an audible whisper between Lady Caroline Dormer, and Flora Dyrham, which she had overheard at Wolseley Hall, and which was probably intended to meet her ear,—expressive of compassion for some man (in whom she did not at *that* time recognise her husband,) who, by snatching at a shadow in the water, had let slip a treasure!

“Sir Alan Harkesley, Lord Bowbridge, and the rest, persuaded him that he could not afford to marry a woman with ten thousand pounds,” was Flora Dyrham’s observation,—affecting to speak in a mysterious tone. “But he has found a fortune four times as large, a much less profitable speculation; and after all, his lofty love has become a capital *parti*!”

A cloud of chagrin overspread the ivory

brow of Eleanor as she reflected on how many sides an advantage had been recently obtained over her.

“I suppose you are going to-night to the Opera?” added Lord Newbury, gathering up his reins as if about to wish her good bye, and ride off; “though, as it is the last night, there will be no one there but the *artistes!*”—

“I have no thoughts of going. I permitted Lady Barbara before she went to Cowes, to give away the box for the remainder of the season.”

“Ah, by the way,—I forgot that you had been out of town,” replied Newbury. “Rawdon was saying just now, at White’s, that he saw you the other day at Hartstonge Races, with the angeliferous Dormer, Mrs. Strat, and two or three more of that *clique*;—looking like Gulliver at Lilliput,—or, rather, as if you were shockingly afraid of catching the bumpkin fever!—But he brought far worse news of your brother.—”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Eleanor, a little alarmed, —two days having elapsed since she quitted Wolseley Hall.

“Rawdon declares that, after being singed by Lady Caroline and fleeced by Mrs. Strat, Sir Wolseley had stooped to folly so far as to propose to Flora Dyrham!—a thing which no man of sane mind would have ventured, any time within the last fifteen years!”

“I am not much afraid of having her for a sister-in-law!”—said Lady Mortayne, touching the check-string at the same time, as a signal to the coachman to proceed, and relieve her from all this fooling. And, with a smiling nod, Lord Newbury galloped off.

But though thus professing tranquillity, she could not disguise from herself that a man who fancied himself so knowing as Sir Wolseley, was only too likely to be taken in; and such a Lady Maitland established in her old home, amounted almost to exclusion of herself. And alas! she could not afford to lose either her brother or Wolseley Hall.—If, already in her married life, there had been moments when the support of the one and shelter of the other appeared desirable, how likely that there might come a time when the protection of her brother would prove essential to her peace!—

If he really thought of marrying Flora Dyrham, there was an end of all intimate intercourse between them,—an end of all hold upon the old terrace-room ! Yet, however vexatious the mere supposition of such a match, the harassed Eleanor admitted the impossibility of remonstrance.—She had not the smallest influence over his mind. She had done nothing to cultivate the affections which even the coating of selfishness wherein he was enveloped by an injurious education, had been insufficient to extinguish. Disgusted, on her *début* in life, by his reckless expression of a wish that she should marry and release him from his responsibilities, instead of accomplishing the mission of her sex and inspiring him with kinder thoughts and feelings by her own warmth of sisterly affection, she had met coldness with coldness,—harshness with scorn ; till the trees that should have extended their branches towards each other, to form a friendly and inseparable shade, creating support for themselves, and comfort for others who were to succeed them, stood isolated and apart in the

landscape of life, as if severed by the thunder-stroke of a storm.—And the influence of a storm it was, that thus divided them ! The fatal consequences of their mother's fault was likely to pursue them to the grave.—According to the fiat of Divine law, the sins of the parents were visited upon the children.—

But however Lady Mortayne might have neglected to cultivate the instincts of fraternal affection, she felt bitterly that the estrangement of the only human being on whom, saving her already estranged husband, she had a claim for attachment, would be an evil past reparation.—

She had already learned from the solitude of her house since her return to town, that, while encouraging the daily visits of Barrington, she had suffered her popularity to decline. If admired and followed in a ball-room, she was not skilled to endear herself in the ordinary relations of life. She had not supplied by friendly intimacies, the want of family connexions.— Her comings and goings were not, as with many women, a signal of joy or regret to an extensive circle. There was nothing genial in her

feelings, as there was nothing genuine in her manners, to beget that cordiality which overlooks a thousand faults.

A sudden chill seemed to oppress her spirits, amid the cheerlessness of the empty streets and deserted houses of which the inhabitants were gone to be happy and beloved elsewhere,—at the idea that at her early age,—but little past the epoch of girlhood,—she must depend henceforward upon the power of her beauty to create an interest in her favour! Like most people who discover that their destiny is *manqué*, the blame was laid wholly upon others. The wilfulness with which she had thrown herself into the wrong path on overstepping the threshold of life, was left out of the balance.

Unluckily, the momentary compunction produced by apprehension of her brother's marriage, was soon converted into irritation, by a chance encounter with Sir John Hildyard at Andrews's door, whither she was driven in search of the last resource of the last *ennuyée* wearying out her listlessness in town,—a new novel.

“In London, my dear Lady Mortayne?”—

cried he, in undisguised amazement;—"Have you been here long?—in that case, I have a thousand apologies to offer for not having called in Brook Street. But Morty wrote to me a week ago, from La Rochelle, mentioning that you were passing a month at Wolseley Hall;—and I am at this moment on my way to execute a commission for him, in consequence of a letter received this morning, in which he apologizes for employing me, on the express grounds of your absence from town!"

"I returned sooner than I intended, in consequence of Lord Heriford's death."

"Ay, true!—I forgot the relationship,"—said Sir John, glancing at her black dress,—
"the party is probably broken up. But, of course, you are not going to stay in town in this infernal weather?—One is shrivelled up like a leaf, by merely looking at the pavement!—But let me hasten to ask your orders for Morty. Bowbridge and I start for Dover this very night, to sail to-morrow for Bordeaux, to join the Nantwiches.—The benefit derived by your husband from change of air, has determined the duke to

extend his tour; and we have promised (as perhaps you are aware,) to meet them at Bayonne, and make a little excursion in the Pyrennees."

"I have not heard from Lord Mortayne since he left Cherbourg," said Eleanor, endeavouring to look unmoved under the mortification of learning all these particulars from a stranger.—
"I wrote to him at La Rochelle, entreating him to prolong a tour from which he seemed to derive so much benefit; and which my disqualifications as a sailor prevented my enjoying in his company."

"In that case," replied Sir John, as if somewhat relieved, "I fear it is useless to endeavour to persuade you to join him, with Bowbridge and myself, in the *Water Nymph*?—The fastest, and best got up thing in the squadron!—If the present wind holds, we shall be at Bordeaux on Sunday."

"A thousand thanks. I must not offer such an affront to the *Amphion* as to change my mind," replied Lady Mortayne. "I will not even trouble you with letters; for with the chances of wind and tide against you, they

would probably reach Bordeaux sooner by the post."

"I must content myself, then, with conveying to him the agreeable intelligence that I never saw you looking more blooming, and that your natal air has repaired all the ravages of the season!"—retorted Sir John, with the complimentary flourish usually assumed by a man of a certain age towards a woman for whom he feels nothing. And Lady Mortayne, however keen her appetite for flattery, felt so conscious that the flush upon her cheek was the result solely of suppressed anger, that she could not but consider his compliment as ironical. After receiving the three fresh-looking marble-covered volumes, smelling of paste, that purported to supply excitement to her listless hours, from the hands of a deferential young gentleman who stood patiently with the title-page invitingly open, till the colloquy between the *belle* of the season and the fashionable *roué* leaning into her carriage was at an end,—she drove away, sadder, if not wiser, than before.

In spite of all her gifts of youth and beauty,

—rank and fortune,—in spite of having compassed what, amid the turmoil of her vain ambition as a *débutante* she held as the *ne plus ultra* of human happiness—her prospects were at that moment so uninviting, that, had even a woman on whom she relied as little as Lady Barbara Bernardo been in town, there was some danger of her being driven, by a craving after sympathy, into the folly of entrusting the secrets of her destiny to a worthless confidante.

A still more dangerous alternative suggested itself. A few hours would suffice to convey to Charles Barrington her complaints of the incivility of his wife,—the disregard of even the common courtesies of life evinced by Lord Mortayne,—and her suspicions that the want of *empressement* betrayed towards her by the world, arose from the unkind construction placed upon their intimacy.

But of this indiscretion, she fortunately stopped short. Though aware that such a letter would be welcomed on bended knees, as by a devotee some sacred relic, instincts of common decency bad her refrain from addressing her

admirer amid the solemnities of a house of death!

And well that she did so. For though the impassioned feelings with which Charles Barington saw her depart for Wolseley Hall only a fortnight before, were far from diminished,—though her countenance remained perpetually hovering in his memory as the controlling influence of his destinies,—his mind had undergone a considerable revolution, under the influence of his mournful sojourn at Greensells.

A mere return to the spot which had instigated an union with Lady Alicia de Capell as a step that was to secure his prosperity in life, could not fail to remind him that the transfer of his homage from the *débutante* to Lord Heriford's daughter, was his spontaneous act and deed; and that his courtship had been as eager as if inspired by nobler motives.

But, independent of the estimate of his own conduct forced upon his recognition, there was something in the solemn aspect of the noble mansion, under whose roof the confined clay of

the owner lay an object of reverence more complete than had ever awaited the poor Marquis in his life-time, which induced serious reflection. There was nothing great, nothing imposing, in the character of the deceased. He was not a man of genius ; he was not a man of influence. The general sadness that prevailed throughout his household and estates arose solely from the regularity of his life, and the punctual discharge of his duties. He owed no man any thing. He had disregarded no one's claims. His old servants, after leading a cheerful life under his sway, were liberally provided for by his will ; and his tenants and dependents were prepared to follow him to the grave with the respect of well-earned loyalty. A good husband, —a good father,—a good master,—the conscientious order of his life, in all its relations, had created for him a pedestal more solid than men of transcendant talents or brilliant personal accomplishments are often fated to establish.

The profound reverence manifested towards the chamber where his remains lay enshrouded, impressed even the thoughtless young man who

had hitherto regarded personal respect as a tribute to great actions or heroic deeds, rather than to moral worth or kindliness of nature.

The whole family was to follow its chief to the grave. The venerable mother of the Marchioness had brought her beloved grandchild to take her part in the sad assemblage; and Lord and Lady Kilsythe were there, for the first time since the wedding of Lady Alicia, so as to constitute a formidable family phalanx of those entitled to resent his unkind neglect of his absent wife. Aware that reluctance to expose to observation the estrangement between them, and not the adduced cause of her situation, had alone prevented Lady Alicia from joining the family reunion at which she had requested him to be her representative, his severity towards her appeared in a more heinous light than he had ever yet regarded it. For, after all, she was as much sinned against, as sinning. Whichever might be the first offender, he could not conceal from himself that the charm of his adored Eleanor's azure eyes was the true origin of his implacability.

It was the first time in his life that Charles Barrington had ever come in contact with the aspect of death ; and the influence of that awe-striking spectacle was not lost. His heart was heavy within him. Amid the reverential hush of the house,—the muffled tread of the servants,—the whispering voices of the family,—and the pomp of sables on every side, any recurrence to the vanities of the metropolis, or the vices that spring to life in that hot-bed of corruption, would have revolted his “better part of man.”

When Lady Sophia, unsuspecting of the coldness existing between him and her sister questioned him with the tenderest solicitude concerning the event which was about to afford her a new interest in life, he felt ashamed of having scarcely yet given it a thought.—The attention of grandmamma was luckily engrossed by those more solid items of family prosperity which it was not in her nature to overlook,—the income of the new Marquis,—the jointure of her daughter,—and portions of her grandchildren.—For had *her* peremptory voice interfered, his good resolutions might have been nipped in the bud.

But the mild tenderness of Lady Sophia disarmed him. There was something in her true, pure, rational, yet ever-feminine nature, that made him reluctant to shock or offend such a sister-in-law.

But for these newly-awakened sentiments of decency, Charles Barrington must have been roused to the bitterest self-upbraiding by the terms of the following letter:—

“The papers inform us, my dear Charles,” wrote his cousin Maria, “that you are at Green-sells, with the rest of the late Lord Heriford’s family; and I seize the occasion to write to you in a spot which I shall always consider the closing scene of our childhood’s intimacy.—From the period of our visit there, new interests interposed to disunite us. But I do not feel the less privileged by ties of blood to address you with the frankness of a sister.

“That your mother has been some weeks my inmate, I need not inform you; nor need I attest the happiness caused by her visit. How often we talk of you and yours, you will also readily imagine. But you should not,—no, indeed, dearest Charles, you *should* not,—leave us to

learn from chance, or the intelligence of the public journals, so much that concerns your happiness. In describing Lord Heriford's death, the newspapers inform us that 'his lordship's family is assembled at Greensells, to attend his remains to the grave, with the exception of Lady Alicia Barrington, who remains in town, awaiting her accouchement.'

"Cannot you fancy, dear cousin, the emotion experienced by my poor aunt at this announcement? Cannot you fancy how fondly she is disposed to love a child of yours, and how proud we should all feel of your son? Since the paper conveying the news reached Hexholm, we have talked and thought of nothing else!—All our wishes are realized!—Henceforward, your household happiness is complete.—You will have something of your own to care for—something of your own to live for.—I shall have no need to wish you less deeply involved in the vortex of fashion that I may have the better chance of hearing your name pronounced with honour among those of the benefactors of your country. It is whispered

that, at present, you are an idle member of the house!—No matter!—*Now*, you will have motives for exertion.

“ Shall you think me very *very* presuming, or do you think Lady Alicia will take it amiss, if I ask leave, should the expected babe be a girl, to officiate as one of its godmothers?—If a boy, the post will be a solitary one;—bespoken, no doubt, by Lady Heriford; or, if not, due to your own dear mother;—and, in that case, I must wait for your second child. But should all be as I wish, do not,—*do not* refuse me!—

“ And now, dearest Charles, farewell.—We unite in a thousand good wishes.—To your father I need not allude; for, near as you are to him at Greensells, you have doubtless visited Easton Hoo.”

But that he had promised Lord Henry to accompany him to town immediately after the funeral the following day, upon this hint, (from one whom he revered nearly as much as he was *bound* to reverence her,)—Charles Barrington *would*, perhaps, have made his way to Easton; not, as he at first intended, to see the

improvements that were going on; but as a token of respect to his father. For, under the example of the present Marquis of Heriford, filial piety was beginning to assume, in his sight, the goodly form of virtue.

He had, however, made his arrangements; and Henry, who was in low spirits, would be annoyed at having to perform his journey alone.

Moreover,—but this argument he did not adduce to himself as a motive—the papers of the day announced the return of Lady Mortayne to Brook Street. And, though resolved to recede by imperceptible degrees from the *liaison* springing up between them, and endeavour to re-knit the broken ties of his domestic happiness, it was necessary that they should meet,—it was necessary that he should place before poor Eleanor some explanation of his conduct.—

Besides, she had an account to render of her own.—What reason would she give, he should like to know, for having broken her promise of writing to him from Wolseley?—Did *she*, too, regret and repent the past?

CHAPTER XIV.

O thou weed
Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet,
That the sense aches at thee,—
Would thou hadst ne'er been born !

SHAKESPEARE.

By the time Charles Barrington approached London, some portion of the good resolutions bequeathed by Consideration, (after coming, according to Shakspeare's simile, like an angel, and whipping the offending Adam out of him,) had melted into air. His brother-in-law, Lord Henry, was one on whom impressions, however strong at the moment, were as transient as on the shifting sand; and, as with every succeeding mile, the sadness produced by the gloomy scene from which they were emerging gave place, progressively, to his ordinary mood

of mind, his railleries and boastings, empty as they were, had in some degree the effect of rendering less urgent in the eyes of his companion, the wise system of reform he was contemplating.

“Yes! I think I see you and Alice settled at some quiet place in the country!” cried his lordship, in answer to Barrington’s disclosure of his projects for the autumn.—“I agree with you that people with a family ought to have a *pied à terre*.—But, hang it, unless a place in the country be one’s own, one passes one’s life in trenching another man’s vineyard!—And you do not, you say, mean to purchase?”—

“I have not sufficient ready money at my command to establish myself at once as I would wish,” replied Barrington; “and in the event of my father’s death, my mother would be quite ready to give up Easton; which, shocked as you may be by the avowal, I still consider an improvable place.”

“As a shooting-box.—Ay! I grant you that you might make it liveable enough, as a shooting-box!”—

“And the vicinity to Greensells would, of course, recommend the place to Lady Alicia,” added his brother in law.—

“*Entre nous*, I doubt whether Alicia’s family-affection be strong enough to reconcile her to the loss of so much as half a dozen feet square in the proportions of her drawing-room!”—retorted Henry. “However, if Clan. make up his mind to spend part of the year in his fishy dominions, I suppose it will be less disagreeable to her to be a minnow in waters of which the triton is of her own kith and kin!—But I’ll tell what you must do, Charley.—You must persuade that dove-eyed cousin of yours to relent in my brother’s favour—(for I will be hanged in chains if ever he marries any one else!) and *that* would create a neighbourhood for you, at once.—For the life and soul of me, I can’t fancy Alice settled in the country without a good *chef* and *salle à manger à cinquante couverts*, within easy reach of her *taudis*.”

A sigh escaped poor Charles while he listened to an announcement that augured so ill for the domestic happiness he was vaguely contem-

plating; and right glad was he that, for the rest of their journey, Lord Henry's talk was of French actresses, and the iniquity of railway interdictions against cigars;—for there was something corrosive in the words of his lips when they touched upon sacred subjects.

It was agreed between them, that Henry should proceed with his companion to Arlington Street, to dine without ceremony with his sister. Lady Alicia must have a thousand inquiries to satisfy, concerning her father's last moments; and Lord Henry saw little that was inviting, at that moment, in his bachelor apartments at poor, dreary Heriford House with the achievement newly affixed over its portal, to interfere with his acquiescence in the plan.—His mother and sisters were already on their way to Warleigh; the Marchioness having been persuaded by Lady Kilsythe that, after their long attendance on the deceased marquis, the searching breezes of the Dorsetshire coast would prove an invaluable restorative.

The two brothers-in-law stepped, therefore, into the same cab, at the terminus, leaving

their servants and baggage to follow; and it was between seven and eight o'clock when they reached the West-end,—the hour at which the stragglers of the *beau monde* wend clubward or homeward to their dinner.

“After all,” observed Lord Henry, as they approached Arlington Street, “notwithstanding the rubbish one talks about the ever-ready comfort of White’s, and the warm welcome of an hotel, as the old Duke of Marlborough said of Blenheim, ‘home is home, be it ever so homely!’ And right glad shall I be of a corner of Alice’s sofa, and a dish of Pointd’ail’s cutlets.”

Even his companion sympathized warmly in the sentiment. After the sadness of the scene they had left behind, Charles Barrington admitted that it would be soothing to enter a cheerful habitation; nor, since the day he started with his bride from Heriford Castle, had his feelings been so kindly disposed towards her.

On arriving at his own door, he was a little surprised to find the shutters closed.

“What the deuce is the meaning of this?”

cried Lord Henry, jumping from the cab. "Do you keep such early hours, Barrington, as to shut up shop by daylight?"—

In another moment, the door was opened by Lady Alicia's own man, and the mystery explained.

"My lady is out of town, Sir," said the footman, whose arms had scarcely found time to shuffle themselves into his new black livery.—
"We were not expecting you till Monday."

"Out of town?" reiterated the indignant brother;—"a pretty dodge, upon my word!"—
But the indignant husband seemed to look for further explanations.

"Lady Coylsfield called yesterday afternoon, Sir," resumed the servant, in reply to his mute interrogation, "and finding my lady rather low, persuaded her Ladyship to accompany her to Haresfield.—Lady Alicia left word, in case you should arrive, that she should return on Monday morning."

"Kind and considerate enough of the Coylsfields!"—observed Barrington, turning to Lord Henry.—"Lady Coylsfield doubtless felt that,

Alicia's whole family being out of town, it would be too great a trial for her to be left *quite* alone on the day of the funeral."—

And while echoing, as was expected, the exclamation of "kind and considerate enough,"—Lord Henry took it for granted that his brother-in-law, or Mrs. Barrington, had written to secure for Lady Alicia the good offices of their somewhat frigid cousins.

"This is not exactly what we expected, my dear fellow," said Barrington, shrugging his shoulders with an air of self-commiseration at the close of the explanation,—“but no matter! every thing will be set to rights for us, in a minute or two.—Throw open the drawing-room windows, Robert, towards the park; and let Pointd’ail know that Lord Henry dines with me, that he may get dinner ready as soon as possible.”—

The shutters were opened in a moment, to admit the melancholy gleam of the evening sun; but having completed the operation, Robert approached with a mysterious whisper towards his master.

I am sorry to say, Sir, that Pointd’ail is not

at home ;—my lady being absent, and you, Sir, not expected before Monday, he is gone to prepare a cabinet dinner at Lord Pegwell's."

"The deuce he is!—My dear Henry, this is indeed an unlucky look out!—But I promise you that Pointd'ail has found an apt scholar in the kitchen-maid, who dressed an admirable dinner for us, one day when the fellow was ill."

"I am extremely sorry, Sir," again interposed Robert, "but Mary has stepped to Chelsea to see her mother.—We all understood, Sir, from her Ladyship, that you were not to be at home before Monday."

"You seem to have done an amazingly impertinent thing, Charley, in making your appearance in your own house before you were looked for!" cried Lord Henry, vexed at such a series of *contretemps*.

"If the thing had happened on any other occasion,"—pettishly retorted Charles, "I could have sworn that it was a trick intentionally played by Lady Alicia.—But I will not suspect her of a vexatious act on such a day as this!"—

"We have but one resource," said Lord Henry. "Dusty and tired as we are, I am not quite up to White's.—Let us go and dine quietly, and *incog.* at the University,—where we shall not meet a soul of our acquaintance."

"To say the truth, I am so cut up by my journey, that I would rather dine on a mutton chop, or a crust of bread, at home,"—said Barrington,—whose quick eye had already detected in the bundle of letters and notes placed in his hand by Robert, one, of a nature that inclined him strongly to get rid of his brother-in-law.—"*En revanche*, my dear fellow, you must dine here on Monday, when Lady Alicia will be at home."—

"And Pointd'ail at home—which is ten times more to the purpose!"—retorted Henry de Capell. "On Monday, I shall be better up to the thing; and as our cab is still waiting, it may as well carry me at once to my destination."—

And before the vehicle conveying the affectionate brother-in-law to whom the offer of a mutton-chop dinner sounded very much like

a threat of arsenic, turned the corner of Arlington Street, Barrington had hastily run his eye over a note, the hand-writing of which, however tremulously traced, was not to be mistaken for any other than that of Lady Mortayne.—

“Come, come, dear C., the moment—the very moment—you arrive in town!” wrote the guilty Eleanor, who appeared to have suddenly laid aside all fear, and all restraint,—“I *must* see you without delay.”

Willingly would her astonished correspondent have complied, dinnerless, with the commands laid upon him.—But, as he had not refreshed himself since he attended the remains of his father-in-law to the family vault, a change of dress was indispensable;—and more than an hour elapsed, and night was come, and the lamps were lighted, before he made his appearance in Brook Street.—

After the dreariness of the deserted house he had quitted, how cheerful appeared its lights—its flowers—its alert attendance!—What a soothing atmosphere, and what a welcome to

shake his good resolutions, and place him, where he had found himself before in the same fatal spot, at the feet of the lovely mistress of a home too attractive! Announced at once by the servants as though he were an expected guest, nothing unusual startled him in the appearance of Eleanor, unless the dazzling whiteness of skin produced by contrast with the deep mourning she wore. But no sooner had the butler retired, than, on fixing his eyes upon the lovely face which had never before struck him as half so lovely, he saw at once that something was grievously amiss—that her frame and countenance were convulsed by some secret emotion. The woman usually so self-possessed, was for some minutes incapable of uttering a syllable.

“My dear Lady Mortayne,—my dearest, dearest Eleanor,—for God’s sake, what is the matter?—What—what has happened?”—cried he,—almost as much disturbed as herself.

Still, instead of replying, she struggled with her tears; and the expression of any *real* emotion in that ever-smiling face, seemed to impart new charms to its feminine delicacy of feature.

At length, suddenly extricating from his grasp one of the hands that were fondly and pleadingly pressed within his own, she drew from her bosom a letter,—as if it purported to afford him the explanations she had not breath to utter.

“From Mortayne!”—cried he, glancing at the superscription, ere he tore it open, and saw that it was dated from La Rochelle, the preceding week.

“Having ceded to the wishes of my friends the Nantwiches,” wrote poor Morty—“that I should accompany them to the Pyrennees, I feel that some explanation is necessary of an absence you will probably resent.—Resent it!—It is my *wish* that you should do so! Steeped as I am, to the very lips, in bitterness and misery,—bitterness and misery to which I shall not, either now or at any future time, more explicitly advert,—I would fain have you understand, without further explanation on my part, that our union must be henceforward as that of mere acquaintance.

“I am fully sensible of the seeming harshness of this announcement.—But it is as wholly

without remedy, as my mind is without comfort, and my heart without hope!—Better, perhaps, were we to part altogether;—for the part I have to play may prove too trying to my forbearance. But so young,—so lovely,—for *you*, Eleanor, I dread the results of such a step,—both as regards your own happiness and the honour of the name you bear.—Resolve therefore, I entreat you, to meet me on my return with the guarded feelings and deportment which can alone enable us to reside under the same roof.

“Would—would—that I had gone to my grave unenlightened!”—wrote the miserable husband, insensibly relaxing as he proceeded, from the severe tone he had imposed upon himself.—“Would that I could have been spared the anguish now gnawing into my heart. But the malice of that hateful woman, Lady Alicia—(provoked, perhaps, by what she considers my ill-usage of her sister,) has avenged itself in the form of a fatal—a maddening revelation.—And oh! may curses light upon her for the deed which has rendered life a burthen to me!—

“One line addressed to me at Bayonne, to satisfy me that you have received this ; or how shall I find courage to return to England,—to my miserable,—my desecrated home !”

“He knows all, then !”—faltered Charles Barrington,—crumpling up the letter with a movement of rage, that would fain have expended itself on the writer, instead of on that senseless paper,—“and probably *more* than all ! That accursed woman, who, from first to last, my poor injured Eleanor ! has been the bane of our happiness, has, doubtless, created in his mind suspicions far beyond the truth !”—

“But for the conviction of my guilt, Mortayne would not, I am convinced, have written thus !” replied, Lady Mortayne with quivering lips and streaming eyes.—

“And what have you done?—Have you written to him as he desires ?”—

“Not a word !”

“But you *will* write ?”—

“No !—since he chooses to asperse me unjustly,—be it so !”—

“But unless you attempt some self-vindica-

tion,—as Heaven knows you are entitled to do,—the breach between you will become irreparable !”—

“And do you suppose that I wish it otherwise?—What arguments could I use to my husband to prove myself innocent?—*Am* I innocent?—Can I deny my preference for another?—can I deny that I have listened to protestations, from that other, of the fondest attachment?”—

“Heaven be thanked,—you can *not* !”—replied her enamoured companion. “But for both our sakes, Eleanor, is it wise to provoke further the wrath of this man? The feelings excited by Lady Alicia’s envious misrepresentations, might still be tranquillized, and his whole confidence restored.—*Your* influence, if you chose it, might obliterate every vestige of suspicion from his mind !”—

“*My* influence?—As if I would condescend to exercise it for a purpose so base!—No! Charles, no!—The worst which I have risked, I will abide. Lady Alicia has accomplished what I had always had reason to suppose her purpose,—my utter—*utter* ruin ”

“It was, doubtless, the cowardly consciousness of what she has done,” cried the enraged husband, “that drove her out of town, in the expectation of my arrival.—The sudden *empressement* of the Coysfields, seemed a little extraordinary.—I see, now, that she was cunning enough to secure herself a refuge with those whom, of all others, she knew to have the strongest claim on my deference. Lady Alicia was aware that I should hesitate about an exposure of this unhappy business before *them*!—But the danger is not over.—In a day or two, at furthest, she must return home;—and *then* —”

“And then, dear Charles, her situation must exonerate her from the reproaches and punishment she deserves!”—pleaded Lady Mortayne.

A cruel imprecation burst from the lips of Barrington at this allusion to her claims on his forbearance.—

“And what, then, are your views and wishes?” whispered he, in an altered tone, turning, after a moment’s pause, to address the weeping woman by his side. “From the tenour of Mortayne’s

letter, it is clear that he only waits to hear from you, to return to England.—This letter is dated a week back ;—and, at this time of year, a couple of days would bring them across.”—

“ Yes,— I am aware that his arrival may be hourly expected,” replied Lady Mortayne. “ And my retreat to Wolseley Hall is now, alas ! cut off. This evening’s paper announces my brother’s rash marriage with that odious Flora Dyrham !”

“ Surely, however, you will not remain here to meet your husband ?”—pleaded Barrington.— “ All that passes in London, however secretly, is sure to find an echo.—The whole affair would soon get whispered about. Nay, perpetually surrounded by his intimates, Mortayne could scarcely fail to confide his domestic troubles to one or other of them.”—

“ He has most likely already done so !”—replied Eleanor, in a tone of calm desperation. “ In this letter, which is so unlike himself, I discern the promptings of the Duke of Nantwich ; who, through life, has dealt so remorselessly by his wife !”

“Confound both him and his advisers!”—was the involuntary ejaculation of one who, however proud to figure in the eyes of the world as the favoured admirer of the lovely Eleanor, had no mind to abide the penalty of his happiness. For the vision of a quiet home and honourable position in society, which had lately begun to find favour in his sight, had not yet forfeited its charm under the influence of the touching looks fixed upon him, or the tendril-like hair that floated on his shoulder.—

“But in that case,” resumed he, after a short reverie, far from advantageous to the cause of the woman who was watching with secret emotion every turn of his countenance,—“in that case, there is double reason for desiring that your meeting should take place in the country. At Mortayne, he would be left entirely to the influence of your eloquence,—of those words and looks which no living mortal could resist!”

“Ay, at Mortayne, unrestrained by fear of the reproaches of the world, he would not only forgive the past, but take me to his arms again as his wife.—And this is what you wish!—And

this is what you counsel!"—cried she, with a frantic laugh, clasping her hands together with impassioned energy, at the detection of what she considered as his cold-blooded egotism.—"You,—*you*, who have made me what I am!—so wretched—so degraded—would have me live a life of falsehood;—swearing with plausible hypocrisy to love and honour the man I have betrayed, and whom you have taught me to regard with loathing!"—

"It is for *your* sake I would fain suggest temporizing measures,"—her deeply-moved companion was beginning.

"No, no, Charles!—Do not deceive yourself!"—cried she, interrupting him.—"It is for your own,—only for your own!—You dread the consequences of the storm of guilt and misery you have conjured up.—You are afraid of what the world will say,—of what Lady Alicia and the De Capell family will urge to your discredit, should you openly support my defiance of the rights and authority of Lord Mortayne!"—

"Compose yourself, Eleanor!"—remonstrated he,—more shocked than touched by her violence.

—“ I am afraid of *nothing*, unless to see you wantonly compromise your happiness and honour.”

“ Look at the nature of the happiness you accuse me of compromising !—Consider for a moment my unfortunate destinies !”—resumed Lady Mortayne, a little subdued by the tenderness with which he endeavoured to soothe her, by again taking her hand.—“ Inexperienced in the forms and usages of society, Lady Heriford,—with what views, she best can tell,—undertook to supply towards me, on my entrance into the world, the place of a mother ;—and, at *that* time, Lady Alicia, with all the consummate art of her nature, affected to treat me with the affectionate frankness of a sister. And what was the consequence ?—That, noting the preference with which, from our first interview, you inspired me,—she made you the object of her unceasing derision !—Every defect she could detect in your person,—manners,—dress,—position,—was enlarged upon with the bitterest exaggeration.—Not content with the mockery lavished upon yourself,—your family,

—your residence,—your condition,—she seized upon my own innocent affection for you, to be made the subject of her epigrams and caricatures; till, by incessant sarcasm, she taught me to blush for the strength of my attachment,—pretending to have learnt from ear-witnesses, your boast that my fortune alone attracted you, and determined you to obtain my hand.”—

“Liar!”—interrupted Charles Barrington, in a transport of rage, which he was unable to repress.—“May God forgive her iniquity!—Lady Alicia, and every member of her family, knew only too well from Henry, (who then pretended to be my friend,) that my poverty alone prevented my hazarding a proposal!”

“And thus, by degrees, she weaned me from you,”—added Lady Mortayne, almost intimidated by his fury.—“By degrees she persuaded me that you regarded me only in the light of a match to be secured; and that, in conversation with herself and others, not one of my girlish faults and weaknesses escaped your irony. What appeared to be ample confirmation of her assertions was not wanting. No sooner did I

endeavour to ascertain the real nature of your feelings towards me, by affecting to encourage the attentions of my cousins, Clandon and Henry, than you openly devoted your addresses to Alicia!"—

"Could you only conceive the duplicity with which her two-fold treachery was carried on!"—

"I *can* conceive it,—for experience has enlightened me, to my cost!"—retorted Lady Mortayne.—"I know her now;—I know with what heartless self-possession she can inflict torture upon those whose hands are clasped affectionately in her own!—But at that time, Charles, I was not so much as entitled to reproach her. With dexterous cunning, she had made me commit myself in presence of her family by seeming acquiescence in mockeries of her own suggestion, such as appeared to express indifference on *my* part that justified fickleness on your own.—What art—what artifice prevailed against me!—What a complication of treachery sealed the misery of my life!—Deserted and humiliated, I was thankful to Lord Mortayne

for the homage which at such a crisis served to raise me in my own estimation. In a rash moment of gratitude, I accepted his proposals, —in a rash moment of desperation, gave him my hand !”—

“And do you imagine,” argued Charles Barrington, deeply moved by her avowals, “that I was less a victim than yourself?—The same manoeuvres, so successful in your case, were not less so in mine. My memory, thank God, does not serve me to repeat the sneering sarcasms cited by Lady Alicia, as the result of your visit to Easton Hoo.—From *her* I learned that you regarded me as a mere fortune-hunter,—a designing adventurer.—And curses upon the mean credulity of human nature, that induced me to lend a too ready ear to her mischiefs, without appealing at once to yourself for an honest avowal of your feelings!”—

“But why do we recur to all this?” cried Eleanor, starting from her seat, and impetuously pacing the room.—“The evil is now irremediable.—From her first act of injury to her last, Lady Alicia has only been too success-

ful. The husband forced upon me by her arts, has, at length, by her arts, been converted into an enemy.—And with that enemy, Charles, I am to pass the remainder of my days!—Young as I am, what a prospect lies before me!—the seclusion of Mortayne Manor, in company with an irritated and peevish tyrant!—But, on this point, I have made up my mind. Await the return of Lord Mortayne, I neither can nor will.—The life I have hitherto led with him disgusts and maddens me; and how much more bitter will it become, when the galling superiority with which he regards and teaches others to regard me, is justified by what he has lately learned!”

“My dearest Eleanor,—ill as it may become me to preach patience to you,” said Charles,—

“It does, indeed, ill become you!” interrupted Lady Mortayne;—“for to *you* is owing my whole amount of wretchedness! Had you at first been candid with me,—had you—— But why, *why* do I reproach you?” cried she, flinging herself once more distractedly on the sofa by his side, on perceiving how profound and sincere was

his sympathy. "I see,—I see that you are scarcely less miserable than myself;—and every pang you feel, doubles the anguish of my own."—

A violent burst of tears relieved the oppression of her heart.—But this ebullition of feeling served only to increase the storm of passion raging in that of her companion.—Regarding her as a victim to her affection for *him* as well as to the treachery and malice of Lady Alicia,—how was he to contemplate with less than that indulgence towards youth and beauty inherent in the bosom of every man, the lovely woman so helplessly submitted to her misplaced attachment?

"And what would you have me do, Eleanor?"—whispered he, at length, after having vainly endeavoured to tranquillize her growing perturbation.—

"Any thing, rather than bid me return to the arms of the man I fear and loathe!—Rather would I be lying senseless on the stones under yonder window," continued she, in a tone of exasperation,—pointing to one

still open to admit the night breezes from the adjacent park, which gently waved the draperies of the muslin curtain. "Rather seek peace in an untimely grave, than degrade myself by mean submission, and hourly hypocrisy!"—

"You have resolved, then, to rend asunder at once the ties that bind you to your husband and society?"—

"I have!—Mortayne has generously left me the alternative.—He suggests measures which I firmly decline. I will *not* live with him on the terms he proposes!—My whole soul revolts against such a system of imposture. By his express desire, my fortune was placed by our marriage settlements at my own disposal; nor is he the man to interfere, or wish to interfere, with such an arrangement. I am rich, therefore;—in any other country than England, rich enough to command the utmost comforts of my station. I will go abroad.—I will seek tranquillity in countries where the paltry distinctions of prudish England,—that slave of *cliques* and *coteries*,—exercise no control!"

At that moment, it was impossible for the harassed and bewildered man she was addressing, not to revert to the wayward culpabilities of the mother of the misguided being before him,—exiled through life, by her own misconduct, from the decencies of her native land; who, on finding in him the husband of a De Capell, had addressed to him at Paris that touching letter of supplication, which, by nearly falling into the hands of Lady Alicia, had accidentally become the source of so many evils;—though purporting only to obtain information concerning the destinies and dispositions of the son and daughter, known to her but by name;—and imploring him never to reveal to *them* the identity of the mother they had been taught to believe in the grave, with the profligate and notorious Comtesse de St. Chamond.—

Was there, indeed, a blight upon the nature and happiness of the family?—Was this younger and fairer offshoot of a time-honoured line also predestined to pollution?—

“But do not imagine,” resumed Eleanor, unable to interpret the mournful *reverie* into

which he had fallen,—“that I wish *you*,—the origin of all this misery,—to become the partner of my flight! To *your* enjoyment of existence, the fine world, with its senseless ceremonies and empty pretensions, is indispensable.—That lesson, at least, you have learned from Lady Alicia!—In that ambition, your tastes are henceforward identified.—Remain, therefore, Charles!—remain to derive what happiness you may from the pompous pleasures of London life.—Number over your lordly guests;—and, hand in hand with the woman who has so basely trampled upon me, devote yourself to domestic felicity with a partner to whom your origin is contemptible, and your person indifferent!—Forget that you ever thought me worthy your wooing!—Forget the fond affection which, in spite of my better reason, I am still unable to withhold!”—

“No,—Eleanor!—again and again, no!” cried Charles Barrington, seizing her hand, and pressing it wildly to his brows,—his eyes,—his lips. “Since so fearful a step is to be taken, we must take it together.—If you quit the

country, worse than death would be my portion, were I to remain.—Let Lady Alicia content herself with the pity and approval of the world! On *her* no blame will rest.—To *her* no harm can come. A powerful family is on the spot to afford her support.—It is not with her as with thee, my poor, helpless Eleanor! I will secure to her, not only her own fortune, but more than half my own;—how gladly sacrificed, for the privilege of enjoying, far from her and her hateful community, the love and peace of which she has worked so hard to deprive me!”—

But why attempt to unravel the sophistry by which two persons, devoid of principle, endeavoured to blind each other to the heinousness of their projects! Suffice it, that before that memorable evening closed, their plans were definitively formed;—not deliberately, indeed,—but with the impetuosity characteristic of those, who, having overleapt the barriers of decency, proceed as though they could not rush too blindly and wilfully on their destruction!—

They met in madness, but in guilt they parted!

only, however, to meet on the morrow with every preparation completed to quit for ever a spot where their intimacy had commenced amid the levities of a ball-room, to lead them by slow degrees, characterised at every step by vain and heartless selfishness, to a conclusion bringing shame on all belonging to them ; and to themselves, a double portion of misery and repentance !

CHAPTER XIII.

A graver, mightier, and more solemn sense
Of all that hallows woman's holiest tie,
Woke in the woman's soul.

SIR E. BULWER LYTTON.

“LET us hasten to London,—I entreat you, let us hasten to London:—it is only on the spot we can ascertain the exact truth of this grievous business!”—exclaimed Maria to the heart-broken mother of Charles Barrington, to whom her son despatched a few lines, on the eve of quitting England, beseeching her to break to his cousin the wretched climax of his misfortunes; and entreating that both would place the most merciful construction in their power upon the heinousness of his fault. “Do not,”—added Maria, with all the warmth of her

womanly nature,—“do not withhold your countenance from his poor deserted wife!”—

“Lady Alicia has hosts of friends,—Lady Alicia belongs to a powerful and numerous family!”—replied Mrs. Barrington.—“She needs, my dear Maria, no consolation from *us*!—What has hitherto been a source of grief to me, is now my comfort,—that no real attachment ever united her to my son.”—

“Not when she married him, perhaps; I grant you that she did not care for him *then*.—But remember how long they have lived together!—She *must* love him now,—*now* that she is about to become the mother of his child;—and think what must be the trial of finding herself abandoned at such a moment!—Oh, aunt,—dear aunt,—let us go to her!—Let us learn all she has to disclose.—Let us palliate all she has to complain of.—You see what Charles says in his postscript:—‘Maria is the only human being, except yourself, who will hold a kindly feeling in reserve to welcome my unfortunate child.’”

“Well, then,—let us go,”—replied Mrs. Bar-

rington, in a hoarse and broken voice:—"If we do not comfort *her*, we shall at least comfort ourselves."

Lady Alicia was, however, far more than they dreamed of, an object of pity.—On her arrival in Arlington Street, from Haresfield, full of the anxieties produced by a disclosure of the *liaison* formerly existing between Lord Mortayne and the Comtesse de St. Chamond, accidentally made to her, some days before, by one of her foreign acquaintance, (who cited it in proof of Morty's *rouéism*, in utter ignorance of the relationship between the Maitlands and one of the most worthless of her sex,) she was apprised by the servants, who saw nothing to be concealed in the occurrence, that their master had left town the preceding evening.—Even when they placed in her hands the brief and cruel letter of farewell addressed to her by her husband, intimating that she was to see him no more, how were they to surmise the nature of its overwhelming contents?—

A long, long fit of insensibility fortunately relieved her from the acuteness of the pang

produced by her full perception of the truth.—Conscious that there existed *some* justification of her husband's bitter assertion that all which was befalling her was decreed by the retributory justice of Heaven, she looked around, and vainly, for some friend into whose bosom she could pour the story of her griefs. Mother,—sisters,—brothers,—all were absent from town.—Even Lady Coysfield, on parting from her that morning, had proceeded to the Isle of Wight; and her foreign attendants, terrified by the excess of her affliction, had not courage to utter a word. There was not one,—*not one*,—to say—“where is your pain?” or “whom shall we send for to exhort you to courage under your sufferings!”—

Before night, however, the case became too urgent for demur.—It was a nurse,—it was a medical attendant, rather than her friends, whose services were in request.—Till morning, the unfortunate lady languished and suffered. Throughout the following day, the hands of menials wiped the cold dews of agony from her brow; and when, towards evening, she was

informed that she was the mother of a son, no one was present to hail with a kiss of welcome the babe that struggled so friendlessly into a world of woe!—

The physicians, to whom the absence of Mr. Barrington from town was represented by the servants as accidental, thought it right to inquire of their noble patient, as soon as her strength and composure were sufficiently restored, whether her husband was likely to return on the morrow, or whether it might be desirable to communicate the event that had taken place.—But the mere allusion to his name produced symptoms so unsatisfactory, that it was judged better to leave all to chance. Lady Alicia's numerous friends would, doubtless, undertake the announcement.

The upper servants, on the other hand, took it for granted that, by her ladyship's desire, Dr. L—— would communicate to the family at Warleigh the news of her safety; for almost the first words uttered by Lady Alicia after the event, consisted in an express interdiction against announcing in the newspapers the birth of her

son and heir. She did not choose that the fugitives should learn it through such a channel.

But to *choose* at all, at such a moment, was a perilous exertion.—The whirl of emotion which, even had no unusual stress of nature existed, might have sufficed to produce indisposition, increased to a fatal degree, in Lady Alicia's present weak state, the burning fever in her veins. The thought of her little son,—the son for whom it behoved her to live,—the son for whom, even in her premature widowhood she might still form projects of happiness or ambition,—ceased to convey definite ideas to her mind.—Before the close of the third day, delirium, succeeding to stupor, released her from further anguish.

Alarmed at their master's prolonged absence, and ignorant where to address him, the servants, anxious to be relieved from their responsibility, suggested to their lady's medical attendants that a letter should be instantly despatched to Greensells, to the Marchioness of Heriford, acquainting her with Lady Alicia's dangerous condition.—But even

this failed to secure the prompt attendance of her family.—Another day must elapse, before the communication, duly forwarded, could reach Warleigh.

When, therefore, the gentle mother and cousin of Charles Barrington approached the house in Arlington Street, which, in its more brilliant days they would have hesitated to enter, their arrival was hailed with joy by the terrified household, who had begun to fear that their lady would breathe her last, unsolaced in her dying moments by a kindred hand or heart;—and though the new comers were strangers among them, the mildness of their lady-like deportment commanded confidence and respect.

So alarming, on the other hand, was the account rendered to the travellers of the state of the invalid, that even Maria scarcely allowed herself a momentary glance at the beautiful infant placed by the nurse in her arms, to be sanctified by the first kiss of affection imprinted on its little cheek!—Not a moment was to be lost in gaining the sick chamber.

On entering the darkened room where lay the unhappy object of their solicitude, a low moaning sound alone proclaimed that the unfortunate Lady Alicia yet, breathed and suffered; exhaustion having succeeded to the paroxysms of frenzy.—She was not, however, yet, fully sensible.—Her faint, but incessant whispers were as incoherent as, before, her passionate upbraidings; and when she murmured the names of Eleanor and her husband, it was with the same wild accusations of treachery and deceit.—

“I knew not that it was her mother!” faltered she. “No, Charles,—as Heaven is my judge,—I knew not that it was her mother! Forgive me, forgive me;—I am not wholly to blame.—You were too peremptory. You should have confided more in me.—Am I not your wife?—Was I not entitled to know all?—Charles, you should have trusted me,—you should have trusted me!—and then, your child would not have been born fatherless,—an outcast on the face of this bitter, bitter earth!”—

Though unable to affix any rational inter-

pretation to the words of the sufferer, Miss Barrington felt convinced that some sad mystery existed ;—some mystery which she trusted might assign some slight exoneration to her cousin,—since the dying Lady Alicia claimed forgiveness, and admitted herself to be also in fault.

Having instantly dismissed their carriage and announced their intention of passing the night beside the sufferer, Maria and the horror-stricken Mrs. Barrington devoted themselves, without hesitation, to attend upon that haughty being who, in her pride of health, had never accosted them with a kindly word ; and who was now dying, neglected by her fashionable friends, and forgotten by all !—

Towards morning, after a short cessation of her moans which inclined the watchful Maria to hope that she was asleep, the words of the invalid, though fainter, became more rational.—Recrimination upon others, gave place to self-accusation.

“I have lived without God in the world!” was one of her terrible avowals. “Neither

faith nor gratitude were in my heart; and now, in my day of trouble, He lends me no helping hand!—I have pursued shadows, and they fly from my grasp.—The real—the true—the holy—which I despised, are far, oh! far from me *now!*—

The dreary hours passed on;—hours without rest or hope for those who saw that her strength was ebbing fast;—and, as the cords of life were loosed, her thoughts became less intent upon herself.—She alluded no more to the cruelty of her husband.—Solicitude for the child she was leaving, seemed to take possession of her mind.—

“There will be none to train him up;—none to redeem his little feet from the same parched dreary desert of worldliness which has made me what I am!”—murmured the dying woman.

“Yes—yes”—interposed the faithful Maria, bending over her, and taking soothingly into her own, the burning, trembling, hands of the invalid.—“Those who bear his name will love, and cherish, and watch over him, for his unhappy father’s sake.”

“God be thanked that you are here!” faltered the sinking woman, instantly recognising the gentle voice of Maria, so indicative of her gentle nature.—“Let the helpless little creature be brought this moment, that I may solemnly entrust him to your care!—And should it ever be given him to see his father’s face, tell him, Maria,—tell the cousin of whom you have been the truest friend, that in my last moments I forgave him,—forgave him as I trust to be forgiven,—because conscious, (oh! be it not too late!) of my unworthiness of pardon or peace.—And plead with him—plead earnestly, Maria,—as none have ever pleaded with myself,—that he be not wholly engrossed by the things of this world!—Let not *his* dying bed, like mine, be one of anguish and remorse.”

Tenderer words proceeded from her lips, and tenderer thoughts melted in her heart, when, a moment afterwards, the babe was brought at her command, and placed for the first and last time in her arms; to be baptized in the tears of a dying mother, and consecrated to God by lips already convulsed by the approach of death.

Mrs. Barrington, utterly overcome, and lying in a fainting state in the adjoining room, was spared the terrors of a death-bed to which the son whose faults of nature she had long recognised as the fruit of her pernicious indulgence, had contributed so cruel a share. But before Maria received back into her arms, from those of its expiring mother, the babe towards whom she was fervently engaging herself to supply a mother's place, two other persons had glided through the glimmering light into the room, and fallen on their knees in silence by the bedside,—dreading to shake the few last sands in the glass, by agitating the feelings of Lady Alicia.

Some instinct of nature, however, apprised her that they were there.—

“Thanks, dear brother and sister!” said she, in a somewhat stronger voice,—extending her hands to Lord Heriford and Lady Sophia, who had travelled all night, preceding the rest of the family, after receiving the tardy summons of the physician.—“You are come to close my eyes!—You are come to promise that, to my poor child, you will not be as callous and care-

less as I, alas! have been to *you*. The life and prosperity with which I have dealt so unworthily, are taken from me, my poor Sophy. You sometimes warned me, and I scoffed at your warnings: but spare them, oh! spare them not to my son!—For his father's sake, the kind friend by your side has adopted him has her own.—Maria,—dearest brother!—give me your hands, and promise me to unite for ever in this sacred trust.—Worthy as you are of each other, I should die content, if comforted by the certainty that your union secured happiness to each other and a lasting home to my orphan boy!”

The fervour with which the hands thus united, and not withdrawn by Maria, were pressed to her lips, was the last effort of expiring nature.—Another moment, and nothing was heard in that darkened chamber but the wail of a feeble infant, and the stifled sobs of the mourners for the dead!

* * * * *

More than a year has elapsed since the afflicting scene, which the world, so apt to

estimate the morality of events by their results, regarded as a frightful aggravation of the guilt of Charles Barrington and the reckless partner of his flight.—When the news of Lady Alicia's death transpired, their case was decided by the wisdom of the clubs to be the most infamous on record;—the treachery of Eleanor towards her cousin, and the ingratitude of Barrington towards the patrician family which had stooped to receive him into its arms, being duly thrown into the balance.

Into the remoter origin of the misconduct of both, no one, of course, was at the pains to inquire; nor, as the adopted son of the new Marquis and Marchioness of Heriford is tolerably secure from the evil influence of the same worldly and superficial education, is it desirable, perhaps, that the evil should be traced too accurately to its source.

Even Maria, when adverting to the future destinies of little Charles with the husband to whom, though tardily, she has warmly and strongly attached herself, abstains, by tacit consent with her lord, from all allusion to the past.—But not even the prospect of a child of

her own has, in the slightest degree, diminished her maternal devotion to the lovely boy so solemnly bequeathed to her care; in whom poor Mrs. Barrington, while fondly sharing the duties of her niece, already traces, though more in grief than triumph, the features of her absent son.

From Italy, where the fugitives have established themselves, enjoying the sort of semi-distinction which, in the cities of the continent least frequented by English people, is secured by the lavish expenditure of a handsome income, brief and peevish letters occasionally reach Easton Hoo.—The graceless Charles invariably describes himself as an exile, pining after the domestic comfort of his native country, —as though his banishment, and the disgrace of his companion, were not the work of their own reckless profligacy.—The repentance of both, though unavowed, is manifest in the unceasing murmurs of his discontent!—It is clear that neither of them have strength of mind to endure the slights occasionally shown them by their fellow-countrymen on their travels.

To his father, rather than his gentle mother,

are those letters usually addressed.—A gradual degeneration of nature is begetting some sympathy between him and that sorry parent who, on learning the act of madness into which Charles had suffered himself to be betrayed, was chiefly solicitous concerning the amount of damages likely to be entailed on his delinquency by the rigour of the law ;—and who, on learning that Lord Mortayne did not intend to prosecute, and that the guilty Eleanor retained the enjoyment of her income, readily reconciled himself to the decease of Lady Alicia, whom he had always detested as a useless fine lady,—more particularly since her ladyship's death-bed wisdom secured him against being encumbered with the rearing of his little grandson.

“I can see the child whenever I choose to go and spend a day or two at Greensells!” was his reply to Sir Hildebrand and Lady Chalkneys' expressions of amazement that he should not have claimed the care of the only child of his only son.—“As to my wife, she is oftener with Lady Heriford than at home.”—

The name of Lady Heriford sealed their

lips!—For though the selfish curmudgeon of the Hoo has become more than ever an object of contempt to his country neighbours, they are compelled to some forbearance towards the near kinsman of that young and lovely Marchioness, who imparts as much lustre to her private station, as her lord to the eminent political position he has lately assumed in the country.

Even Grandmamma admits without reserve that not a fault is to be found with either, and that the administration of the last representatives of the family has been improved upon by the present; and as soon as her lady-daughter shall have sufficiently recovered her vexation at the improvident marriages of Lady Blanche Nebwell and Lady Mary Rubric, she will probably see cause to echo the verdict of the shrewd old dowager.—The Vicary Arables, the Ironsides, and a few other notables of the county, indeed, are a little surprised to find no public days announced at Greensells.—But they still trust that the eclipse of their robes of lilac satin and pink gauze may not be permanent:

and that the roar of county hospitality will recommence, as soon as the achievement of the late Marquis is taken down, and the birth of a son and heir commemorated at the fine old seat.

Of Lord Mortayne, it is difficult and painful to write.—The fashionable world asserts him to be once more a wanderer in the East. But those to whom the happiness of Morty is too dear to admit of trusting to rumour on such a point, are aware that, for the last twelve months, he has never quitted the secluded precincts of the Manor. His friend, Sir John Hildyard, the only person admitted as a guest, describes him as broken in health and decrepit in appearance,—with the untimely snows of sorrow sprinkled on his head! But to his *confidence*, not even Hildyard has been admitted. On one occasion, when Sir John was inadvertently betrayed into invectives against the perversity of nature betrayed by one so young, so lovely, so seemingly innocent as Eleanor Maitland, a restraining hand was laid upon his arm by Morty ;—and the grave adjuration of—

“ Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all !”

silenced the words upon his lips.

By a strange chance, it happened that, on Lord Mortayne's return from his yachting expedition, when, on the strength of the hints supplied by his servants, he instantly rushed to Arlington Street for an explanation of his wife's absence, the person by whom his visit was received was—Lady Sophia de Capell !

Apprehensive that, in the exasperation of mind to be apprehended from a husband so injured, he might expose to the utmost publicity the extent of his wrongs, Lady Sophia, though overcome by grief and consternation, resolved to see and to entreat him.

“ Grievously as you are suffering, dear Lord Mortayne,” pleaded the amiable woman whose destinies he had so wantonly marred,—“ believe me you are not the *greatest* sufferer.—My poor sister is lying yonder, in her coffin !—Take pity on *her*,—take pity on *us* ;—and do not, I beseech you, pursue with too unrelenting a virulence, those whose disgrace must recoil alas ! upon yourself and upon us all !”—

It was not difficult to satisfy one in whom forbearance was a distinguishing virtue, that his object was to *spare* rather than to *avenge*. He spoke of Eleanor with pity.—He took upon himself the larger share of blame.—It was not necessary to particularize the terrible *motives* of his mercy: but a few stringent words sufficed to reassure the discerning Lady Sophia,—so mild, so dignified in her sisterly sorrow,—that he had no thought of appealing to the tribunals of the land, or provoking newspaper exposure.

Already his resolve was taken, to bear his humiliation in silence, as meted out by Justice Divine.

Among those who have profited least by the catastrophe in the De Capell family, is Lord Henry; who is still waiting, and providentially enough will probably have long to wait, for his accession to the Kilsythe barony and estates. For though the amount of his *post obits* will be considerably increased by the suspense, his experience will be proportionably augmented. In the decline and fall of the popular Morty, he has witnessed a striking

example of the career of a mere man of the world,—shrivelled into premature old age,—with health, and heart, and fortune hopelessly broken by a too lawless indulgence in the pleasures of fashionable life.

“Had he married Sophy de Capell, what a first-rate fellow would he have turned out!” exclaimed Bowbridge, one day at White’s, to Sir Alan Harkesley, when, in a fit of disgust at the slang and antics of Lord Newbury, and the pompous priggism of the newly-created Sir Meshech Bernardo, he was tempted to revert to Morty as “the noblest Roman of them all.”

“Ay, ay!—We should all turn out wonderful fine things, if something had happened which was never likely to happen!”—retorted Newbury, flippantly breaking into the conversation. “But don’t take to preaching on an empty claret butt, my dear Bowbridge, in the midst of the jaunts and jollities of the London season;—with the Derby week before us, and the birthday close behind!—And, by the way, Bow, guess who was the beauty of the said birthday?—The Durham bride,—the rustic Marchioness of Heriford!”

“Who, *entre nous*, never approached the critical angle of Hyde-park-corner,” retorted Harkesley, “till she turned it in her bridal chariot, under the safe convoy of our friend Clan!”—

“So much the better for them both!”—rejoined Sir John Hildyard, raising his eyes a moment from his newspaper.—“The best possible conscience-keeper for a woman is her lord and master; and had I a daughter——”

“Hear! hear! hear! hear!”—interrupted Lords Bowbridge and Newbury, amid shouts of laughter from Sir Alan Harkesley and the rest.

“Had I a daughter,” gravely persisted Hildyard, undismayed by their sneers, “a daughter destined to move in the slippery paths of the great world,—it is only under the protection of a man authorized to control and defend her, that, as our London season is at present constituted, I should care to see her—a *Débutante*!”

THE END.

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